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BUDDHIST ETHICS. *Buddhist ethics* is a term of convenience that we may use here to describe systems of mo-

ality as well as styles of moral reasoning that have emerged in Buddhist traditions. Moral reflection has taken various forms in Buddhist civilizations, beginning with Buddhism’s origins in South Asia two and a half millennia ago to its gradual spread across most of Asia through very diverse cultural contexts. While several patterns in moral thinking broadly shared by most or all forms of Buddhism may be suggested at the outset, deeper investigation must attend to particular expressions of Buddhist ethics in their historical and contextual diversity.

ENDURING PATTERNS ACROSS BUDDHIST TRADITIONS.

From one perspective, Buddhist moral theorists are concerned with actions (*karma*), which are deemed to determine one’s future experiences in this and future lives in the round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*). Actions that are prompted by virtuous and discerning intentions yield beneficial results both in this life and in the next. Conversely, actions that are rooted in bad states of mind—in particular, greed, hatred, and delusion—are harmful to self and others and thus result in unfortunate rebirths for those who commit them. This concern with action and its consequences is reflected in a list of basic norms known as the “five precepts” (*śīla*), to which Buddhists often commit formally in religious ceremonies; these prohibit taking life, theft, sexual misconduct, false speech, and the consumption of intoxicants. More positively, Buddhists have looked for moral guidance to the noble eightfold path, which, in addition to describing key elements of wisdom and contemplation crucial for the soteriological path, also articulates a positive description of ideal moral conduct in terms of right action, right speech, and right livelihood. Such descriptions enjoin truthfulness and nonviolence as defining “right” practice.

The emphasis on actions, however, should not obscure the intensive interest Buddhist thinkers have taken in the virtues and dispositions that produce them. Since Buddhists locate moral culpability in intention and volition rather than solely in the action itself, the operations of moral choice are central to ethical reflection. Buddhism offers a close analysis of mind, investigating the emotions, dispositions, and tendencies that drive our action and shape the world. Early Buddhism produced a very sophisticated moral psychology called *abhidharma*, which articulated an analysis of the constituents of the mind and their relationships that are crucial for the development of virtuous dispositions. This moral psychology, as well as other discourses on the mind, assert that the key to developing moral character is to replace negative and harmful mental states and emotions with positive and other-regarding mental states.

In many traditions of Buddhism, meditation practices are deployed to generate beneficial emotions and dispositions, providing practitioners with techniques that allow them to “abide” in particularly morally efficacious states, in particular, compassion (trembling at and allaying the distress of others), loving kindness (seeking the happiness of others), sympathetic joy (celebrating others’ success), and equanimity

(acquiring impartiality). By developing through introspection and contemplation one's mental culture one becomes sensitive to one's emotional life and can then change habitual and harmful states of mind. Thus one cultivates a developed moral subjectivity, a new awareness of oneself as a moral agent.

For example, a meditation practice widely attested in diverse Buddhist traditions aims to cultivate loving kindness towards others (including enemies) through the "mother contemplation." This meditation involves reflecting upon the nature of the endless chain of rebirths, wherein we have all, given the vast infinity of time in *samsāra*, been related to one another in previous lives. In beginning the contemplation, one should consider the tender ministrations of one's mother when one was an infant in this life. Tsong kha pa (1357–1419), an important Tibetan authority on meditation and morality, describes this recollection:

The first thing I did was take a long period in her womb. Thereafter, in the time of my rearing, my downy baby hair pressed against her warm flesh. Her ten fingers gave me recreation. She suckled me with the milk from her breast. With her mouth she fed me. My snivel she wiped from my mouth. Wiping away with her hand my filth, she succored me wearilessly by diverse means. Moreover, my own capacity falling short, she gave me food and drink in the time of hunger and thirst; clothes when I shivered; money when I was "broke." (Wayman, 1991, p. 47)

In the practice one considers one's incapacity and vulnerability as an infant and the crucial acts of care that one's mother (or other caregiver) rendered. Such reflections create a subjectivity of gratitude and loving appreciation for one's parent. From these contemplations, the practice is extended to consider that all beings have at one time been one's mother and have partaken in this role of caregiving and generosity. Thus, it would be unbecoming to harbor angry or hostile thoughts against so-called enemies now, and instead one comes to be suffused with gratitude and loving kindness towards them.

The facts of our interconnected relationships with other beings often provide the resources from which moral disposition and character are seen to develop. Of great concern for Buddhists is the importance of seeking out wise and good friends and teachers for guidance. The Buddha once asserted that "in fact the whole of the holy life is friendship, closeness, and association with good people" (*Samyutta Nikāya*, vol. 2), and an essential ingredient in the development of character is seeking out a "good friend" (*kalyāṇa-mitra*), a wise counselor who can direct one in one's moral and religious progress. The supreme "good friend" of course is the Buddha himself, and we find in his story Buddhism's attentiveness to matters of character through studies of moral heroism. The Buddha's life story provides a locus for investigation into the development of moral agency. In traditional accounts his life story begins many eons ago when he first makes the aspiration to become a buddha, and then embarks

upon a long and arduous spiritual journey across many lives as a *bodhisattva* in which he masters ten "perfections"—generosity, the precepts of morality (*śīla*), renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, truth, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity. The dénouement of this moral and religious quest culminates in his "awakening" (*bodhi*, or *nirvāṇa*) in his life as Siddhārtha Gautama and his establishing of the *dharma* in our era. Buddhists admire this image of human perfection and hold it up as a model for contemplation on the Buddha's qualities and the narrative contexts in which his character was forged. Morality here is envisioned not as a matter of simply adhering to duties and obligations to avoid wrong action, but as aiming ever upwards in developing one's character and virtue.

Since the Buddha, as fully awakened, is no longer accessible as a living guide, one may turn to other resources for community support of one's moral development. In many forms of Buddhism, the best place to find a good friend is the monastic community (*sangha*), a group of men and women dedicating their lives to the religious quest in cooperation with others. They are governed by the monastic code (*vinaya*), which functions as a normative guide for an ideal community. The monastic discipline and its commentaries comprise critical ethical reflection in considering how this community works together harmoniously, how it garners through its exemplary behavior the support of lay Buddhists, and how it deals with breaches in its code of conduct. In its scholastic exegesis on discerning the criteria for determining culpability in violations of the monastic rules, the *vinaya* literature produces a legalistic style of ethical reasoning that carefully parses the nuances of action and intention.

Philosophical doctrines about the nature of personhood are also crucial to Buddhist moral thought. Buddhists deny any notion of a permanent, autonomous selfhood or soul that withstands the changes to which all things in *samsāra* are subject; a person is nothing more than a collection of constantly changing, but causally connected physical and mental phenomena comprised of five "aggregates": physical form, perception, feeling, mental activities, and consciousness. The refusal to grant any notion of a permanent, unchanging personal identity or selfhood has important ethical implications. First, the no-self (*anātman*) doctrine can undermine the selfishness and false sense of individual autonomy that is at the root of much wrongdoing and harmful action. Secondly, this view of personhood affirms one's interconnected dependence on the world, the conditionality and contingency of one's identity, and the pliability of personhood and capacity for change that are vital for a strong sense of moral agency.

This view of the person is accompanied by an understanding of reality that emphasizes the interrelatedness and mutual dependence of all life (*pratītya-samutpāda*), which is both the cause of our suffering and yet reveals the opportunities for emancipation. As part of an intricate web of relationships with other beings (including nonhuman animals and

beings beyond those whom we know in this life alone) we find ourselves in networks of reciprocal obligations. Buddhist thinkers also argue that our interconnectedness with all beings reveals a basic sympathy natural to our condition, in which our fate is intimately tied up with that of others. This doctrine is thus a key resource for decentering self-interest and nurturing compassion.

With these shared patterns briefly sketched we turn now to particular expressions of Buddhist moral thinking as they have developed historically in specific Buddhist traditions.

THERAVĀDA ETHICS. Theravāda, the dominant form of Buddhism present today in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, and Laos, is one of the earliest traditions of Buddhism and has an ancient canonical literature associated with it in the Pali language. As a great intellectual civilization centered in Sri Lanka for well over two thousand years, Theravāda has much to contribute to questions of ethics. One schema of the moral life that achieved sustained scholarly reflection among both ancient and modern commentators is the framework of the eightfold path, which articulates moral and spiritual progress through three stages: moral precepts (*sīla*), concentration (*saṃādhi*), and wisdom (*pañña*). The great fifth-century commentator Buddhaghosa framed his vision of the ideal Buddhist life in these terms, depicting morality as the basis and foundation of all religious progress, even while it continues to find fuller expression as one advances into the highest reaches of spiritual awakening and becomes an *arhat*, an awakened one. The *arhat* is entirely free of the three “defilements” (greed, hatred, and delusion), and is thus considered morally perfect.

While Buddhaghosa intends his model to apply principally to monastics—those who have dedicated their lives to this pursuit—Theravāda offers other resources for describing and reflecting on lay morality and the features of a broad social ethic. One text, very well-known throughout the Theravāda world, that speaks to a range of moral goods is the *Maṅgala Sutta*. The text records thirty-eight diverse prima facie values ranging from avoiding fools and associating with the wise, caring for one’s mother and father, and practicing a blameless livelihood, to moral and ascetic practices associated with the monastic life. No single person would be capable of practicing all of these in a single life, as some of them mutually conflict (such as engaging in a blameless livelihood and being a monastic), yet the text and its extensive commentarial tradition refuse to rank these values and insist that each is “the highest auspiciousness.” The text thus affirms different human social roles and moral capacities, sketching the contours of a model human society. The commentaries engage a “particularist” mode of moral reasoning, refusing to proceed from general principles or criteria, but instead treating a range of diverse moral values on their own distinct terms and in a manner highly sensitive to context (see Hallisey, 1996).

An important element of both personal and social morality is gift giving (*dāna*). Generosity to monks and nuns,

as well as to the poor and needy, is a key Buddhist value, as it simultaneously sustains the community and dislodges greed and attachment to material things. Scholastic reflections on gift giving provide sophisticated ethical treatment of the motivations and intentions prompting gifts, the face-to-face relationships gifts forge, and the proper use of material wealth. Theravadins have also considered moral values associated with the just administration of state power. The ideal of the righteous king (*dharmarāja*, *cakkavatti*), promotes practices of governance that adhere to the precepts, prohibit onerous taxation, limit state violence, establish a viable justice system, and secure protection, prosperity, and peace for the people. When such a righteous king sits in power, order and harmony will naturally prevail at every level of society.

MAHĀYĀNA AND VAJRAYĀNA ETHICS. The emergence of Mahāyāna in India and Central Asia in the second century CE created a paradigm shift in Buddhist approaches to morality. Moreover, when Chinese pilgrims came to India to explore Buddhism and bring it back to China, they were drawn primarily to Mahāyāna teachings, and thus it was predominantly Mahāyāna that spread to China, and thence to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, where it took diverse forms as it developed and adapted to East Asian civilizations. As Mahāyāna eventually gained ascendancy in India, it gave rise to yet another reformulation of the Buddhist path, known as Vajrayāna, traditions of which took root predominantly in Tibet, Nepal, and their neighboring Himalayan kingdoms.

The early Indian Mahāyāna thinkers were not satisfied with what they interpreted as the narrow ideal of the *arhat*, that is, the pursuit of one’s own spiritual awakening and perfection through following the Buddha’s teaching as a *śrāvaka*, a “hearer” or mere follower. Mahāyāna critics preferred instead the model of the Buddha himself, who, through countless eons from the moment of his aspiration for buddhahood, strove for a height of perfection that entailed not only his own release from *samsāra*, but also the teaching and saving of countless others. Thus the ideal of the *bodhisattva* came to be regarded as the pinnacle of Buddhist practice and teaching. Laypeople and monastics alike could strive to become *bodhisattvas*, taking a vow not to rest until they had secured the salvation of all beings as they practiced perfections over innumerable lifetimes.

This exalted ethic was advanced through a critique of non-Mahāyāna traditions, which were construed as providing a morality limited in both scope and conception. Mahāyāna theorists posited three tiers of morality that demonstrated the supposed shortcomings of non-Mahāyāna ethics: (1) The ethics of restraint, which includes the precepts and the monastic code; (2) the ethics of cultivating good states, through the practice of the perfections; and (3) the ethics of altruism, the tireless effort of striving for all beings (Keown, 1992, pp. 137–142). In the Mahāyāna view, the path of the *śrāvaka*, the follower, does not advance beyond the first tier, the mere refraining from harmful actions

through rules of constraint. The *bodhisattva*, in contrast, strives to master the perfections and embrace a self-abnegating generosity toward all beings. The altruism described in Mahāyāna texts knows no limits. The eighth-century philosopher Śāntideva, for example, describes this practice as a willingness to offer oneself up entirely for the benefit of others: “I make over this body to all embodied beings to do with as they please. . . . May I be sustenance of many kinds for the realm of beings throughout space, until all have attained release” (Crosby and Skilton, 1995, p. 21). Upon taking the vow for awakening, the aspiring *bodhisattva* is committed to working unceasingly for the benefit of others through renunciation of his or her own interests; indeed awakening itself is conceived as renunciation of self through love of others.

While the overarching moral value associated with this vision is compassion, the *bodhisattva* works gradually—across many lives—to master ten distinct perfections. The list of perfections differs to some degree from the standard list of the Buddha’s perfections, and includes the stages of the *bodhisattva* path: generosity, moral precepts, patience, vigor, meditation, wisdom, skillful means, vows, power, and omniscient knowledge. According to some formulations, the first six may be perfected in human states, but the last four require the supernatural range of a celestial being; in stage seven, one is reborn as a celestial *bodhisattva* endowed with superior powers of skillful means and knowledge that expand one’s sphere of influence.

The perfection of skillful means (*upāya*) is particularly interesting from the ethical point of view. This virtue involves the mastery of a kind of situational intelligence and beneficial expedience whereby a *bodhisattva* is sometimes authorized, or even obliged, to violate the precepts in order to bring about a greater good. A classic example is a *bodhisattva* who kills a murderous thief on board a ship who designs to kill the passengers and rob them. The *bodhisattva* reasons that it would be heinous to allow the robber to carry out his design, but if he were to alert the passengers they would kill the robber, effecting their own bad karmic results. Thus the *bodhisattva* kills the robber himself, saving all present from the effects of their own murderous intentions. Of course, the *bodhisattva* is prepared to suffer in hell for countless eons as a result of breaking the precept that prohibits taking life; this is regarded as the price of his altruistic and self-denying impulse to take on the sufferings of others through preventing them from committing any harmful deeds. Discussions of skillful means thus demonstrate not only the far reaches of a *bodhisattva*’s compassion, but also a principled resistance to an absolutist moral code, perceiving instead moral demands that take in the complexities of circumstances in such a way that may require subverting normally universal moral rules. Of course, only advanced *bodhisattvas*, well established in insight and compassion, are enjoined to practice skillful means, and breaching the precepts willy-nilly is not sanctioned.

In addition to the *bodhisattva* ideal, developments in philosophy undergirded new approaches to morality in Mahāyāna traditions. Mahāyāna wisdom literature and philosophical discourses expounded the doctrines of “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*), the awareness that all factors of existence are interdependent and empty of their own, independent reality, and “suchness” (*tathatā*), the experience of things as they truly are, without any conceptual superimposition on them. *Nirvāṇa* comes to be seen as not so much as an independent state apart from *samsāra*, but as true awareness that embraces all things in their emptiness and suchness. Since true insight into reality transcends ordinary conceptions of good and bad, these religious teachings sometimes relativized conventional ethical distinctions.

As Buddhism spread eastward, many of these ideas were institutionalized in the tradition of Chan, or Zen as it was known in Japan. In addition, Zen embraced a doctrine that had first appeared in the Indian sūtras of the *tathāgata-garbha*, the seed or potentiality (or, in some formulations, the actuality) of awakening that is said to reside in all beings. Awakening is then not a matter of gradual ascent, but rather becoming aware of one’s already awakened buddha-nature. Morality is thus conceived not as a disciplined path to spiritual progress, but rather as a manifestation of one’s true awakened state.

The lofty Mahāyāna ideal of the *bodhisattva* followed two contrasting trajectories as it spread eastward. On the one hand, we see in this ideal a tremendous and perhaps unequaled exaltation of human possibility and agency. On the other hand, with the emergence of celestial *bodhisattvas*, certain traditions within Mahāyāna take on the flavor of savior religions. One might come to perceive oneself not as an aspiring *bodhisattva*, but conversely, as the beneficiary of the exertions of powerful *bodhisattvas*. The Mahāyāna sūtras depict a new pantheon of savior beings in an expanded cosmology that includes not only celestial *bodhisattvas*, but also multiple buddhas residing in other realms in the cosmos. The historical Buddha Gautama was reconceived to be one of many, indeed, infinite buddhas, many of whom preside in Pure Lands. These Pure Lands come to be objects of wonder and hope, with Buddhists in East Asia sometimes aspiring not so much to become *bodhisattvas*, but to be reborn, often through the intercession of *bodhisattvas* and buddhas, in these bliss realms wherein awakening is easily attained through direct access to the compassion and wisdom of a buddha.

These alternative visions of human agency spawned by the early Mahāyāna teachings come to be articulated and fully crystallized in sharp contrast to one another in Japanese sectarian traditions. Zen offers what has been described as a “self-power” practice, wherein moral and spiritual agency is found through one’s own resources. In contrast, the Pure Land tradition initiated by Hōnen (1133–1212) and his disciple Shinran (1173–1262), advocates a religiosity devoid entirely of self-power and human agency, instead requiring

only that one embrace one's incapacity and look for salvation to the agency of an "other-power," in this case that of the Buddha Amida. For Shinran, humans are helpless and depraved, too deeply mired in passion, hatred, and delusion to effect their own salvation, at least not in our age in which the *dharma* is in decline. One's only hope is to say the *nembutsu*, that is, evoke Amida Buddha's saving grace and compassion, whereby one may be reborn in Amida's Pure Land. Salvation is thus not a matter of morality and good works, and in fact it has particular relevance to the "sinner." In the *Tannisho*, Shinran is said to assert: "Even a good person can attain birth in the Pure Land, so it goes without saying that an evil person will" (Hirota, 1982, p. 23). Shinran is here exalting the faith of the depraved evil person who has no pretence of good works and thus must rely solely on faith in the grace of other-power.

Perhaps not surprisingly, this religiosity based on other-power came to have widespread appeal and has come to be one of the most popular forms of Buddhism in Japan, as it opens salvation to those who are unable or unwilling to embrace the arduous practices of monastic life, meditation, ritual, and so on that have often been the privilege of the elite. Perhaps also not surprisingly, the teachings of Hōnen and Shinran sometimes gave rise to those who embraced "licensed evil," since good works are irrelevant to salvation and the wicked are saved through merely saying the *nembutsu*. Very subtle and sophisticated scholastic traditions of ethical reflection and religious doctrine grew out of these developments in which Pure Land thinkers sought to respond to antinomian challenges and construe morality not as a means of salvation to be sure, but nevertheless as a valuable expression of gratitude for it.

Another important Japanese sectarian tradition is Nichiren Buddhism, named after its thirteenth-century founder. Like the other traditions of his day, Nichiren (1222–1282) adopted a view of history based on a notion of the "degeneration of the *dharma*" (*mappō*). This view of history provides a pessimistic account of human capacity with regard to following the precepts. But Nichiren's response differs from the Pure Land's in that he advocates active devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra*, an important Mahāyāna text. This devotion to the *Lotus Sūtra*, expressed in chanting "*Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō*," aligns oneself with the essence of Buddhist truth and awakening, and thus is thought to bring peace, justice, and spiritual renewal to the world.

Vajrayāna is sometimes conceived as being contiguous with Mahāyāna, and other times to transcend it as the fulfillment and highest level of Buddhism. It accepts Mahāyāna's philosophical ideas and its pantheon of savior deities (and indeed adds to them), but evinces some impatience with the long and arduous path of the *bodhisattva*. Instead Vajrayāna offers, sometimes through dramatic ritual and meditative techniques under the tutelage of a trusted teacher, a "fast path" to awakening. The fast path involves transcending dualities and conventional distinctions, including that between

good and evil, thus exhibiting certain Mahāyāna impulses to downplay the value of renunciation and preceptive discipline in favor of seeking direct realization.

In Tibet, Vajrayāna Buddhism became a central, if not the central, element of the political culture, bringing to bear ethical questions of how Buddhist power should be configured. Buddhism in Tibet developed among sectarian traditions that often vied with one another over matters of ethical concern, particularly over the matter of whether, and in what ways, monastic and ethical discipline contributes to the advancement of mystical insight. The establishment of vast monastic universities, which Tibet inherited from India, contributed to an advanced intellectual climate conducive for debating these and other matters of religious import.

BUDDHIST ETHICS IN MODERN CONTEXTS. Buddhism's encounters with modernity provide occasion for examining applied ethics, as Buddhist values and principles come to be applied to situations that traditional authorities may not have fully anticipated. We might think of modernity's impact in Asia as generating several distinct but related transformations: the rise and preeminence of a scientific rationality and the fruits of scientific and technological inquiry (in medicine, warfare, and industry); new alignments of power, beginning with colonialism through much of Asia and yielding eventually to nationalism and independent nation-states; the advent of new political and economic ideologies and sometimes bloody experimentation with communism, socialism, and totalitarianism; the rise of Western hegemony through global capitalism and consumerism, with their often exploitative relationship to human labor and ecosystems; and new ideas from the West about gender equality, human rights, and democracy. These challenges and opportunities have given rise to much creative work in recent Buddhist ethical thought.

Efforts to modernize Buddhism arose as reformist movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, primarily in Theravāda countries. Modernizing Buddhism was taken to mean excising its supernatural and mythical elements and downplaying the importance of devotional worship, while emphasizing Buddhism's rational, rule-oriented practices for monastics, and the purity of its ethical norms for all Buddhists. In the decades following Indian independence in 1947, Buddhism was configured in almost entirely social-ethical terms by the leader of India's untouchables, B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), who turned to Buddhism as an ideology of social liberation for his people. Another example of such a modernizing effort that shaped Buddhism into primarily a social ethic was promulgated by the Sinhala reformer Anagarika Dharmapāla (1864–1933) as part of his vision of a purified Sinhala Buddhist nationalism. He emphasized new pastoral roles for monks as caretakers of their communities, and new roles for the laity that entailed a bourgeois "this-worldly asceticism." These developments bore the imprint of the colonial government and Christian missionary influences they were seeking to displace. Other expressions

of Buddhist modernism arose through the new literary genre of the novel, wherein multiple and conflicting perspectives may be explored simultaneously, new senses of national, ethnic, and religious communities may be developed, and new forms of social critique and prospects for social change may be voiced.

Today Buddhists from across the Buddhist world (which now includes the West as Buddhism spreads across the globe) are retooling traditional Buddhist thought and practice to address contemporary problems through social activism. This movement has been termed *engaged Buddhism* by one its foremost proponents, Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926), an activist monk promoting peace and nonviolence both in his country during the Vietnam War and globally. The various expressions of engaged Buddhism share the view that Buddhism requires a moral engagement with the world rather than a retreat from it; moreover, Buddhism's deep sensitivity to suffering properly yields political, economic, and social activism to bring Buddhist contributions to rectifying the major ills of our time. In addition to Thich Nhat Hanh, prominent engaged Buddhists include Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906–1993), a Thai reformist monk whose social teachings critique materialism, advocate a Buddhist socialism, and promote harmonious relationships with nature; Sulak Sivaraksa (b. 1933), a Thai lay intellectual who challenges the structures and ideologies of international capitalism and consumerism that exploit people and resources particularly in developing countries like Thailand; and A. T. Ariyaratna (b. 1931), whose Sarvodaya Shramadana movement in Sri Lanka promotes social regeneration in rural and village contexts through active lay Buddhist commitments to service. In addition, there are a number of activists working to redress the role of women in contemporary Buddhism by organizing to reestablish the Theravāda order of fully ordained nuns (*bhikkhunīs*) and confronting traditional patriarchal structures and institutions that limit or devalue the roles and contributions of women in Buddhist societies.

The conferring of the Nobel Peace Prize on two Buddhist figures—in 1989 to the Dalai Lama (b. 1935), the spiritual and political head of the Tibetan people in exile since the Chinese invasion of Tibet in the 1950s, and in 1991 to Aung San Suu Kyi (b. 1945), the leader of the nonviolent democratic movement against the repressive military regime in Burma—has brought international attention and respect to these exemplars of Buddhist leadership and their causes. In addition, contemporary Buddhist scholars are engaging the political and social discourses of our time in Buddhist terms, in ways that challenge and critique existing paradigms for democracy, economics, and scientific and technological development. The work of Venerable P. A. Payutto (b. 1939), in particular, expresses very sophisticated ideals of liberty, democracy, and economic activity informed by Buddhist ethical principles.

Another promising avenue of research in Buddhist ethics that has gained considerable momentum in the last few

years involves a collaboration of Buddhist scholars and cognitive scientists, under the leadership of the Dalai Lama. The collaboration brings to the international and scientific community insights from Buddhist contemplative practice, as well as the intellectual resources Buddhism offers in how it parses mental and affective phenomena. Of particular pertinence for ethics is the collaborators' conviction that Buddhism can contribute to understanding and better management of mental states and emotions, which in the Buddhist view, lie at the root of action. The collaboration is intended to yield practical advances in moral psychology, human development, prisoner rehabilitation, and education.

SEE ALSO Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, article on Ethical Practices Associated with Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

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BUDDHIST MEDITATION

This entry consists of the following articles:

TIBETAN BUDDHIST MEDITATION
EAST ASIAN BUDDHIST MEDITATION

BUDDHIST MEDITATION: TIBETAN BUDDHIST MEDITATION

Buddhist contemplative traditions have thrived in Tibet since at least the seventh century CE, and have taken an astonishing variety of forms ranging over the entire spectrum of Indian and Central Asian Buddhist traditions. This diversity is usually organized under the rubric of “three vehicles” in Buddhism—the Lesser (Hīnayāna), Great (Mahāyāna), and Adamantine (Vajrayāna) vehicles. The historical challenge was to integrate this diversity into cogent systems of practice, and especially how to integrate exoteric Buddhist contemplation based on canonical sūtras, and esoteric forms of Buddhist meditation derived from canonical Tantras. Most Tibetan traditions came to see the Tantric methods as intrinsically superior in their capacity to generate more rapid realization due to their directness. By the thirteenth century, Tibet had established itself as the international center of esoteric Buddhism, and alone developed the full spectrum of Buddhist esoteric contemplative practices. We have thus structured the present survey of Tibetan Buddhist contemplative traditions in terms of traditional categories that proceed through the three vehicles from “lower” to “higher” in terms of the traditional explicit ranking of Tibetan sectarian traditions. The demarcation between “contemplation” and “ritual” is artificial and often of limited use, but we have still relied upon it based on similar distinctions in Tibetan literature.

SŪTRA. Our survey begins with the exoteric traditions of contemplation, the canonical basis of which is Sūtras believed to have been spoken by buddhas. In the present context, Sūtra is short hand for the entire array of literature, institutions and practices that marked exoteric Buddhism in India and Tibet.

Analytical meditation and stabilizing meditation.

Meditation in Tibetan traditions is usually presented as being part of a therapeutic impulse to resolve the dissatisfactory nature of embodied existence for oneself and others. This enterprise has three main phases: listening (*thos*), which includes all forms of study and learning pertaining to normative Buddhist doctrine; reflection or contemplation (*bsam*), the phase in which the meditator processes those teachings in order to arrive at an understanding of their import; and finally meditation (*sgom*), the process by which these concepts become integrated into one’s experience.

The third stage of meditation (bhāvana) is thus focused on deepening the individual’s experience of the insights

gained through the first two stages. In traditional presentations, meditation in this context is often described as being either “analytical meditation” (*dpyad sgom*) or “stabilizing meditation” (*jog sgom*). Initially, the practitioner performs analytical meditation on some doctrinal aspect of the teachings, for example, impermanence, emptiness (*stong pa nyid*; Skt., *śūnyatā*), or compassion (*snying rje*; Skt., *karuṇā*), carefully scrutinizing the different explanations, and finally arriving at an inferential understanding of the topic. These “analytical” meditations often involve formal processes of reasoning that are carried out in reliance upon scriptural or oral guidance. Having arrived at such a clear understanding, one then employs the techniques of stabilizing meditation to reach a firm conviction and nondiscursive intuition of the validity of the teaching or doctrine under investigation. Alternatively, initially it is necessary to settle the mind so that it can remain calm and focused in its pursuit of knowledge and realization. This “calming” practice may in fact be the first form of meditation in which the beginning practitioner engages.

Calm abiding and insight meditation. A related presentation of the general meditative process is that of “calming” (*zhi gnas*; Skt., *śamatha*; literally, “calm abiding”), and “insight” (*lhag mthong*; Skt., *vipaśyanā*; literally, “higher seeing”). This is not unique to Tibetan Buddhism, but is frequently invoked within Tibet to explain basic Buddhist meditation. The practice of calming is designed to build the mind’s capacity for concentration to such a degree that it can remain single-pointed (*rtse gcig*) and undistracted for long periods of time. Such techniques proliferated in Tibet, with the main variance being the object of focus, which could be a candle flame, one’s breathing, a statue of a buddha, a song, a visualized syllable, or a waterfall. Most accounts of calming practices thus outline the object of focus, and then provide detailed accounts of the deepening levels of concentration, as well as pitfalls to avoid. In this way, contemplative calming serves as the meditative basis for the attainment of incisive insight into the nature of reality, specifically into the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena, realization of which are said to result ultimately in liberation or enlightenment. The practice of calming thus clears a mental space for the acquisition of the ability to see the world in accordance with Buddhist doctrinal analysis of its final reality, while the practice of insight cultivates and deepens that perception with an incisiveness based upon the newly acquired capacity for concentration. The practice of calm abiding is thus roughly equivalent to “stabilizing meditation,” while the practice of insight meditation is roughly equivalent to “analytical meditation.”

Meditation on emptiness. While earlier forms of Buddhism stressed the ultimate object of contemplation as “no-self,” namely the lack of any permanent identity in people or things, the Great Vehicle instead stressed the notion of universal “emptiness,” which came to be a dominant motif in Tibet. In a sense, all forms of analytical and insight medi-