

An excerpt from “A Brief Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism” by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

... Perhaps I may conclude with a brief outline of the Buddhist path in terms of the Three Higher Trainings: Training in Higher Conduct, Training in Higher Meditation, and Training in Higher Wisdom.

Training in Higher Conduct

Training in Higher Conduct, which is the foundation of all the precepts, has many aspects. All are based on the avoidance of the ten non-virtues—three of the body, four of speech, and three of the mind.

The three non-virtues pertaining to the body are:

1. Taking the life of any living being, from humans to the smallest insect, whether directly or indirectly
2. Stealing or taking without consent another's property, directly or indirectly, whatever its value
3. Committing adultery and indulging in perverted forms of sexual intercourse

The four non-virtues pertaining to speech are:

1. Being guilty of falsehood by giving others false or wrong advice, information, or physical indications
2. Being guilty of calumny by causing disunity where unity exists and by aggravating disunity where it already exists
3. Using harsh and abusive language
4. Indulging in gossip out of sheer lust and passion

The three non-virtues pertaining to functions of the mind are:

1. Coveting, or desiring to possess, something that belongs to others
2. Wanting to harm others
3. Doubting the teaching on rebirth, the reality of karma, and the Three Refuges

Training in Higher Meditation

Training in Higher Meditation helps the practitioner fix the mind on a single object and develop "mental quiescence" or shamatha. The technique consists of withdrawing the mind gradually from sense objects and conceptual notions so that the mind becomes unwavering, steady, and calm. Such a mind can concentrate on any object of merit with ease.

To accomplish such a state of realization, many prerequisites are necessary. To be brief, according to Bodhisattva Maitreya, practitioners must avoid the Five Shortcomings and cultivate the Eight Introspective Mental Attitudes.

The Five Shortcomings are:

1. Laxity resulting from a lethargic attitude toward meditation
2. Forgetfulness of the meditation object
3. Distractions of the mind—usually lust
4. Inability to prevent these distractions

5. Imaginary interruptions and the use of false countermeasures

The Eight Introspective Mental Attitudes are:

1. Conviction in the virtue of meditation and the ability to discern shortcomings
2. The earnest desire to meditate and the ability to do so
3. Perseverance and a joyful frame of mind
4. Experience of mental and physical pliancy
5. Conscientious effort to focus on the object of meditation
6. Awareness of any inclination toward sluggishness or intense agitation
7. Immediate readiness to counter distraction the moment it is perceived
8. Relaxation of countermeasures when the objective is already accomplished

The Nine Stages of Concentration are:

1. Fixing the mind on the object of concentration
2. Endeavoring to prolong the concentration
3. Perceiving immediately any diversion of the mind and bringing it back to the object of concentration
4. Maintaining a clear conception of even the minutest detail of the object
5. Strengthening the effort by realizing its virtues
6. Dispelling any adverse feeling towards meditation
7. Maintaining equanimity by dispelling disturbances
8. Taking concentration to its furthest limit
9. Abiding in meditative equipoise without assistance or the effort of memory or consciousness

Training in Higher Wisdom

Training in higher wisdom is concerned with developing two kinds of wisdom:

1. Wisdom that comprehends the relative nature of things, or empirical knowledge
2. Wisdom that comprehends the absolute nature of things, or transcendental knowledge

I will briefly describe one more type of wisdom here: the wisdom that destroys all moral and mental defilements, and destroys defilements caused by the power of discriminative thought-the wisdom that comprehends shunyata.

Shunyata

Shunyata, the nature of emptiness, is the ultimate reality of all objects, material and phenomenal. Shunyata is neither affected by the powers of the Buddhas, nor dependent on the karmic fruits of sentient beings. Shunyata simply exists, and its nature pervades all elements. Accordingly, by their very nature, all dharmas [phenomena] are empty. To quote from a sutra, "Whether the Buddhas appear in this world or not, shunyata, the ultimate nature of all objects, is absolute and eternal." Shunyata is the negation of a permanent self and of independent existence.