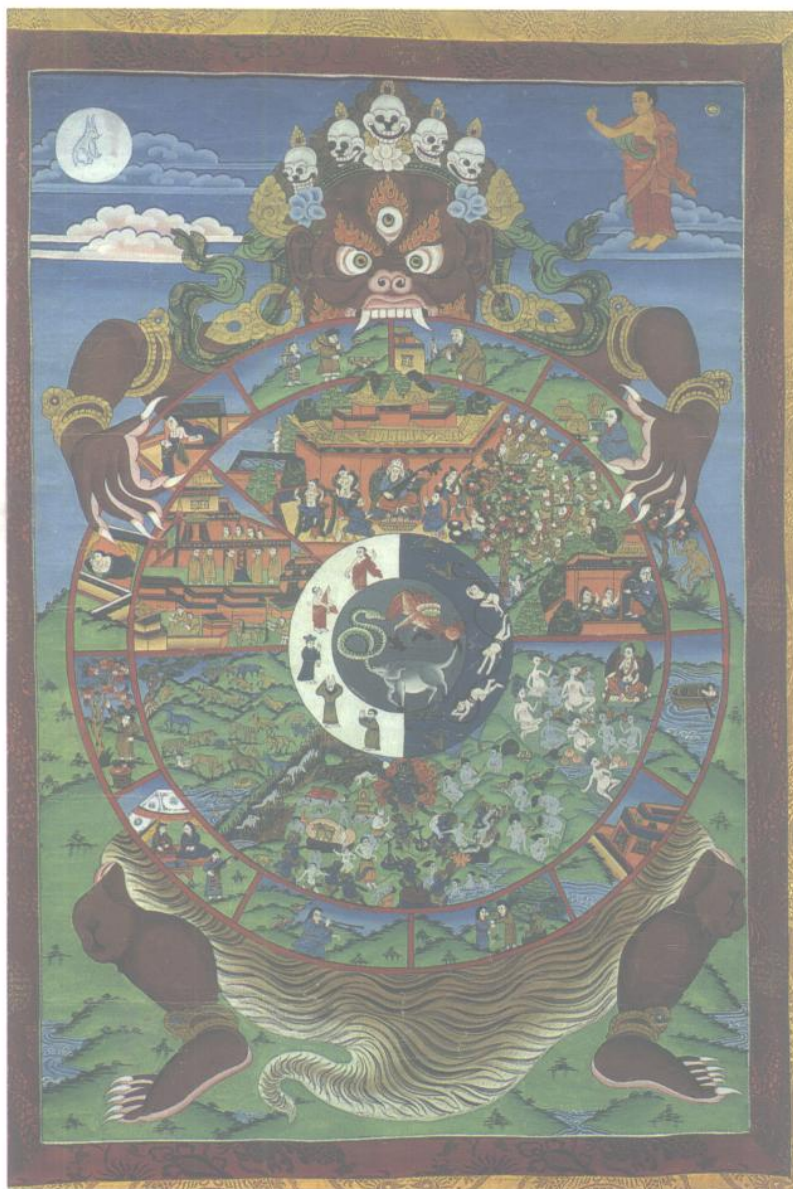




THE DALAI LAMA

The Meaning of Life
from a Buddhist Perspective



Translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins

The Meaning of Life

from a Buddhist Perspective

Tenzin Gyatso
the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

*Translated and edited by
Jeffrey Hopkins*



Wisdom Publications · Boston

WISDOM PUBLICATIONS
361 Newbury Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02115

Text © 1992 Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and Jeffrey Hopkins
Line drawings © 1993 Wisdom Publications

Color photographs of the Wheel of Life by Elizabeth Napper and Daniel E. Perdue
from a thangka in the possession of Daniel E. Perdue.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama XIV, 1935-

The meaning of life from a Buddhist perspective /

Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama;

translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins.

p. cm.

Translation of a series of lectures in Tibetan given in
London, 1984.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-86171-096-7 (acid-free paper) :

1. Buddhism—Doctrines.

2. Religious life—Buddhism.

I. Hopkins, Jeffrey. II. Title.

BQ7935.B774M4 1991

294.3'42—dc20

91-30315

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

98 97 96 95 94

Drawings by Diana Licht

Set in Sabon by Coghill Composition, Virginia, and printed by Princeton
University Press, New Jersey, USA.

Foreword

THE Gere Foundation is delighted to sponsor Wisdom's publication of *The Meaning of Life from a Buddhist Perspective* by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Winner of the 1989 Nobel Prize for Peace, the Dalai Lama is universally regarded as one of the great spiritual friends of our twentieth century. He is the product of an unbroken lineage extending back to the historical Buddha. His forty years as a spiritual teacher and political leader are unique in our time. A brilliant scholar, his words and experience go far beyond the academic. His teachings are rooted in a life tried and tested, a life dedicated to peace, human rights, social change and the total transformation of the human mind and heart. These can only be achieved through a fearless non-violence guided by both a transcendent wisdom and an unshakable universal altruism. "My religion is kindness," he has often said.

Since the Chinese invasion of independent Tibet in 1950, and his harrowing escape to India in 1959, His Holiness has worked tirelessly to free his people from a brutal and systematic genocide that has left 1,200,000 Tibetans dead (a fifth of the pre-invasion population). The unfaltering patience and compassion he has shown for those who continue to destroy his country are finally beginning to bear fruit, and the restoration of Tibetan independence is within sight. The ability to adhere to, embody and generate Buddhist principals under extreme adversity is the mark of a true Bodhisattva.

This book is a wondrous opportunity for us all to make contact

with such a man and his teachings. Readers will derive much benefit from contemplating and meditating on them. The Gere Foundation is proud to be associated with His Holiness and his message of universal responsibility and peace, and pleased to support Wisdom Publications in its efforts to promote these ideals. May this book bring happiness and the causes of future happiness to all beings.

Richard Gere
New York

Preface

WHY are we in this situation? Where are we going? How should we live our lives? Do our lives have any meaning?

In the spring of 1984, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, recipient of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize, addressed issues such as these from a Buddhist perspective in a series of lectures at Camden Hall, London. In five sessions over three days, he presented the basic world view of Buddhism: how Buddhism views the position of beings in the world and how human beings can make their lives meaningful.

These lectures elaborate on the meaning of life by pointing out the causes behind our situation as well as the altruistic purpose to which life can be put. Addressed primarily to a Buddhist audience, the lectures clarify a view of inner psychic cosmology that has had great influence throughout Asia. From a vivid description of how we become trapped in a counter-productive maelstrom of suffering, there emerges a sense of how Buddhists place themselves in the universe. The unsettling description of the steps of entrapment is in fact a call to action, for it shows how, through reversing the process, the limiting prison of selfishness can be turned into a source of help and happiness for others.

The way in which this process plays itself out in the nitty-gritty of everyday life is shown in the Dalai Lama's answers to a myriad of questions from the audience at the beginning of the second through fifth lectures. He elaborates on technical issues raised during the lectures and considers many of the difficult problems we encounter in our lives: how to deal with aggression from

within and without; how to reconcile personal responsibility with the doctrine of selflessness; how to handle a loss of faith in a guru or lama; how to face a terminal illness; how to help someone who is dying; how to reconcile love for family with love for all beings; and how to integrate practice in daily life. The Dalai Lama addresses these and other issues and concerns with heartening directness.

An underlying theme of all five lectures and the focus of the last is the fundamental innate mind of clear light. The Dalai Lama describes the obscuration of this basically pure and innermost mind and its manifestation in the wisdom realizing the emptiness of inherent existence through implementation of tantric techniques. Indeed, the mind of clear light radiates through his entire presentation of the harrowing process of cyclic existence, in which ignorance of the basic nature of phenomena leads beings into actions that leave potencies in the mind which ripen into more suffering. The mind of clear light is the backdrop against which the process can be addressed in great detail.

The Dalai Lama's intelligence, wit, and kindness suffuse the lectures. His emphasis on peaceful solutions to personal, familial, national, and international problems mitigates against making allegiance to a particular system a goal of life. He makes it clear that theoretical systems should be used to serve beings, and not the other way around. He calls on his listeners to use ideology for the sake of betterment and improvement.

I served as the interpreter for these lectures and have re-translated them for this book in an attempt to capture the detail and nuance often missed under the pressure of immediate translation. I wish to thank Geshe Yeshe Thabkhe of the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Sarnath, India, and Joshua Cutler of the Tibetan Buddhist Learning Center in Washington, New Jersey, for help with the stanzas cited in the first lecture. I also wish to express my gratitude to Steven Weinberger and David Need for

reading the entire manuscript and making many helpful suggestions.

Jeffrey Hopkins
University of Virginia

Technical Note

THE names of Tibetan authors and orders are given in “essay phonetics” for the sake of easy pronunciation; for a discussion of the system used, see the Technical Note at the beginning of my *Meditation on Emptiness* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1983), pp.19–22. Transliteration of Tibetan in parentheses and in the glossary is done in accordance with a system devised by Turrell V. Wylie; see “A Standard System of Tibetan Transcription”, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 22, 1959, pp.261–7. For the names of Indian scholars and systems used in the body of the text, *ch*, *sh*, and *ṣh* are used instead of the more usual *c*, *ś*, and *ṣ* for the sake of easy pronunciation by non-specialists.

A list of technical terms in English, Sanskrit, and Tibetan is provided in the Glossary at the end of the book.

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Technical Note</i>	xiii
1 The Buddhist World View	3
2 Life Impelled by Ignorance	25
3 Levels of the Path	47
4 The Value of Altruism	67
5 Compassion and Wisdom Combined	83
<i>Glossary</i>	101
<i>Bibliography</i>	105
<i>Index</i>	109

The
Meaning of Life
from a Buddhist Perspective

1 *The Buddhist World View*

Tuesday Morning

FIRST, let me talk to the Buddhist practitioners in the audience about the proper motivation for listening to lectures on religion. A good motivation is important. The reason why we are discussing these matters is certainly not for money, fame, or any other aspect of our livelihood during this life. There are plenty of activities that can bring these. The main reason why we have come to Camden Hall stems from a long-term concern.

It is a fact that everybody wants happiness and does not want suffering; there is no argument about this. But there is disagreement about how to achieve happiness and how to overcome problems. There are many types of happiness and many ways to achieve them, and there are also a great variety of sufferings and ways to overcome them. As Buddhists, however, we aim not merely for temporary relief and temporary benefit but for long-term results. Buddhists are concerned not only for this life but for life after life, on and on. We count not weeks or months or even years, but lives and eons.

Money has its uses, but it is limited. Among worldly powers and possessions, there are, doubtless, good things, but they are limited. However, from a Buddhist viewpoint, mental development will go from life to life, because the nature of mind is such that if certain mental qualities are developed on a sound basis, they always remain and, not only that, can increase. In fact, once properly developed, good qualities of mind eventually increase infinitely. Therefore spiritual practice brings both happiness in the long-term and more inner strength day by day.

So keep your mind on the topics being discussed; listen with a pure motivation—without sleep! From my side also, the main motivation is a sincere feeling for others, concern for others' welfare.

BEHAVIOR AND VIEW

Meditation is needed in developing mental qualities. The mind is definitely something that can be transformed, and meditation is a means to transform it. Meditation is the activity of familiarizing your mind, making it acquainted, with a new meaning. Basically, it means getting used to the object on which you are meditating.

Meditation is of two types—analytical and stabilizing. First, an object is analyzed, after which the mind is set one-pointedly on the same object in stabilizing meditation. Within analytical meditation, there are also two types:

- 1 an object of meditation, such as impermanence, is taken as the object of the mind and one meditates *on* it;
- 2 a mental attitude is meditatively cultivated, as in cultivating love, in which case the mind becomes of the nature of the object meditated.

To understand the purpose of meditation, it is helpful to make a division of practices into view and behavior. The main factor is behavior, for this is what induces both one's own and others' happiness in the future. In order for behavior to be pure and complete, it is necessary to have a proper view. Behavior must be well-founded in reason, and thus a proper philosophical view is necessary.

What is the main thrust of Buddhist practices concerning behavior? It is to tame one's mental continuum—to become non-violent. In general in Buddhism, the vehicles, or modes of practice, are divided into Great and Lesser. The Great Vehicle is primarily concerned with the altruistic compassion of helping others, and the Lesser Vehicle is primarily concerned with the non-harming of others. Thus, the root of all of the Buddhist

teaching is compassion. The excellent doctrine of the Buddha has its root in compassion, and the Buddha who teaches these doctrines is even said to be born from compassion. The chief quality of a Buddha is great compassion, this attitude of nurturing and helping others being the reason why it is suitable to take refuge in a Buddha.

The *saṅgha*, or virtuous community, are those who, practicing the doctrine properly, assist others to gain refuge. They have four special qualities. The first is that if someone harms them, they do not respond with harm; the second is that if someone displays anger to them, they do not react with anger; the third is that if someone insults them, they do not answer with insult; and the fourth is that if someone accuses them, they do not retaliate. This is the style of behavior of a monk or nun. The root of these again meets back to compassion; thus, the main qualities of the spiritual community also stem from compassion. In this way, the three refuges for a Buddhist—Buddha, doctrine, and spiritual community—all have their root in compassion.

All religions are the same in having powerful systems of good advice with respect to the practice of compassion. The basic behavior of non-violence, motivated by compassion, is needed not only in our daily lives but also nation to nation, throughout the world.

With respect to the Buddhist view, dependent-arising is the general philosophy of all Buddhist systems even though there are many different interpretations of it. In Sanskrit the word for dependent-arising is *pratītyasamutpāda*. The word *pratītya* has three different meanings—meeting, relying, and depending—but all three, in terms of their basic import, mean dependence. *Samutpāda* means arising. Hence, the meaning of *pratītyasamutpāda* is that which arises in dependence upon conditions, in reliance upon conditions, through the force of conditions. On a subtle level, it is explained as the main reason why phenomena are empty of inherent existence.

In order to reflect on the fact that things—the subjects on which a meditator is reflecting—are empty of inherent existence because of being dependent-arising, it is necessary to identify

the subjects of this reflection, these being the phenomena that produce pleasure and pain, help and harm, and so forth. If one does not understand cause and effect well, it is extremely difficult to realize that these phenomena are empty of inherent existence by reason of the fact that they are dependent-arisings. One has to understand the presentation of cause and effect—that certain causes help and harm in certain ways—because these are the bases with respect to which emptiness is to be realized by reason of their being dependently arisen. Hence, Buddha set forth a presentation of dependent-arising in connection with the cause and effect of actions in the process of life in cyclic existence so that penetrating understanding of the process of cause and effect could be gained.

Thus, there is one level of dependent-arising that is concerned with causality, in this case the twelve branches, or links, of dependent-arising of life in cyclic existence: ignorance, action, consciousness, name and form, the six sense spheres, contact, feeling, attachment, grasping, “existence”, birth, and aging and death. Then there is a second, deeper level of dependent-arising that applies to all objects; this is the establishment of phenomena dependent upon their parts. There is no phenomenon that does not have parts, and thus every phenomenon is imputed in dependence upon its parts.

There is a third, even deeper level, which is the fact that phenomena are merely imputed by terms and conceptuality in dependence upon their bases of imputation. When objects are sought among their bases of imputation, there is nothing to be found that is the object imputed, and thus phenomena are merely dependently arisen in the sense of being imputed in dependence upon bases of imputation. Whereas the first level of dependent-arising refers to the arising of compounded phenomena in dependence upon causes and conditions and thus applies only to impermanent, caused phenomena, the other two levels apply to both permanent and impermanent phenomena.

When Buddha set forth the twelve links of dependent-arising, he spoke from a vast perspective and with great import. He

taught the twelve links in detail in the *Rice Seedling Sūtra*.¹ As in other discourses, the context is one of questions and Buddha's answers. In this Sūtra, Buddha speaks of dependent-arising in three ways:

- 1 Due to the existence of this, that arises.
- 2 Due to the production of this, that is produced.
- 3 It is thus: due to ignorance there is compositional action; due to compositional action there is consciousness; due to consciousness there are name and form; due to name and form there are the six sense spheres; due to the six sense spheres there is contact; due to contact there is feeling; due to feeling there is attachment; due to attachment there is grasping; due to grasping there is the potentialized level of karma called "existence"; due to "existence" there is birth; and due to birth there are aging and death.

When in the first rendition Buddha says, "Due to the existence of this, that arises," he indicates that the phenomena of cyclic existence arise not through the force of supervision by a permanent deity but due to specific conditions. Merely due to the presence of certain causes and conditions, specific effects arise.

In the second phase, when Buddha says, "Due to the production of this, that is produced," he indicates that an unproduced, permanent phenomenon such as the general nature² propounded by the Sāṃkhya system cannot perform the function of creating effects. Rather, the phenomena of cyclic existence arise from conditions that are impermanent by nature.

Then the question arises: If the phenomena of cyclic existence are produced from impermanent conditions, could they be produced from just any impermanent factors? This would not be sufficient; thus, in the third phase, he indicates that the phenomena of cyclic existence are not produced from just any imperma-

¹ *sā lu'i ljang pa'i mdo, śālistambasūtra*; P876, vol. 34.

² *rang bzhin, prakṛti; spyi gtso bo, sāmānyapradhāna*.