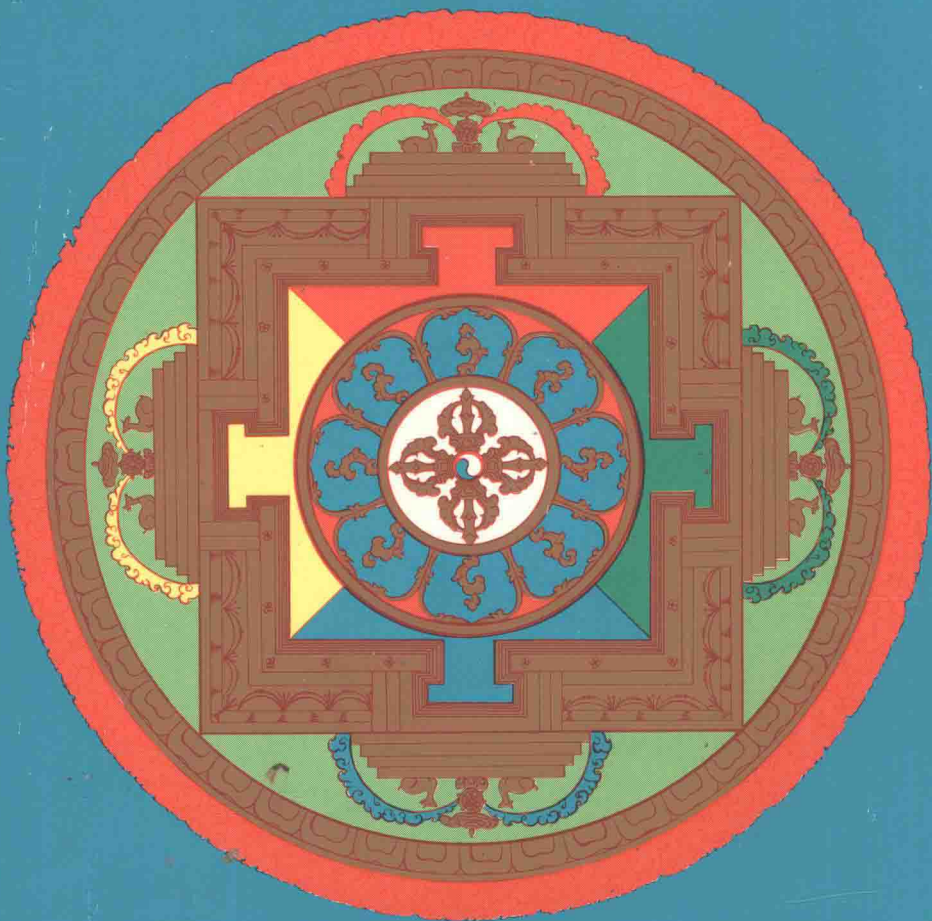


# Gesture of Balance



A Guide to  
Awareness, Self-healing, and Meditation

Tarthang Tulku

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Awareness, Self-healing, and Meditation

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*Openness Mind*  
*Skillful Means*  
*Human Development*  
*Gesture of Balance*  
*Kum Nye Relaxation*  
*Reflections of Mind*  
*Hidden Mind of Freedom*  
*Knowledge of Freedom: Time to Change*

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Page 171: Dorje Legpa, a protector of the Buddhadharma

Page 173: Stupa, a symbol of pure awareness

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## *Foreword*

The essays in this book are unusual in the sense that they present Buddhist ideas and perspectives without indulging in theories about Buddhism. The very fact that we in the Western world speak about Buddhism as if it were a rigid system, that can (and maybe should) be dealt with in abstract terms, shows how little real understanding of a different set of values exists even at the present time. These values are inherent in a person's life and are not merely arbitrarily assigned to it.

The following essays address themselves to the living person, not to an abstraction or a shadowy image; and they do so in terms which a living person can understand intellectually as well as feel deep within his heart. That is why these essays are unusual—they are not simply props or pegs on which to hang one's preconceptions, but stimulants to reconsider and to reassess the situation in which we find ourselves; and through this re-awakening to what is at hand, we are stimulated to set out on the path toward growth and maturation.

Although each essay is self-contained, in their totality they reveal a steady progression. The starting-point is honesty—honesty toward ourselves as being part of a wider life-stream and as sharing in its vicissitudes, not as being detached onlookers. As participants of an ever-widening life-stream we will not be able to grow when we struggle against it, when we build up tensions and blockages, but only when we learn to relax so that the stream can flow calmly in us. Relaxation thus becomes the indispensable prerequisite for meditation which is a ‘tuning-in’ to the life-stream and not the build-up of new fixations, even if they are advertised as a cure-all. Meditation in this sense of ‘tuning-in’ leads to a heightened awareness in which the artificial boundaries of a subject and an object are transcended in a unitary awareness that heals the festering wounds of our dividedness against ourselves. Lastly, as participants we are linked to those who went before us and to those who will come after us. We have received meanings and values from our forebears and we work over and re-interpret this heritage and hand over the emergent patterns to our descendants. Whether or not what we transmit will live on depends upon our honesty, the point from which we set out.

If these essays are unusual because of their directness, so also their author is revealed in a fresh light. In the same way as we tend to create an abstraction of what actually is a concrete message and a practical application, so we also tend to create an image of a man and, in believing in the validity of the image, to forget the real person. Man can never be defined in rigid terms. He is more like a crystal shining in many colors. The title *rin-po-che* means ‘preciousness’, and the preciousness of a crystal lies in its many facets. In these essays we discover

a very important facet of Tarthang Tulku Rinpoche—his warm-hearted humanness. Maybe it is this facet or aspect of his that has to be emphasized over and over again because only too often we forget our and others' humanness and lose ourselves in mere abstractions and fanciful images. It is this humanness that makes the essays all the more significant and places their author firmly in the on-going ever-fresh tradition and transmission of Nyingma teachers and thought.

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## *Preface*

This volume offers some introductory discussions of basic practices in meditation and awareness as they relate to present-day life in America. I have given many such talks to my students over the past seven years, and it was recently suggested that I share these ideas with a wider audience. Certain themes in these chapters overlap to some extent, but this repetition is intended to provide a foundation for developing an increasingly deep understanding.

Although the ideas and practices which are presented here are specifically oriented to the experience of Western people, they are founded on and reflect the many different stages and paths of the Buddhist tradition as preserved by the Nyingma lineage.

The first and most basic theme emphasized by Buddhism concerns confronting life directly—taking stock of our experience honestly, without being limited by small-minded or sentimental fantasies. Each person



must recognize the essential problems and values of human life, so that the proper direction can be taken. A person at the Hinayana stage recognizes that impermanence and frustration are central features of life which must be honestly faced and dealt with. It is understood that each person must take responsibility for overcoming the frustrations of life and for cultivating those qualities which are most central to fulfillment as a human being. Individual effort is called for, rather than a passive appeal for salvation at the hands of another.

Such a mature and realistic attitude is complemented by the Mahayana focus on compassion for others and on a profound understanding of the nature of phenomena. The Mahayana insight reveals that all experience, however constricting or frustrating, is still open in an essential way, and therefore we do not need to seek our individual escape from it. Compassion for others springs naturally from this insight, since our own position is no longer seen as so limited, insecure, or frustrating. We become more concerned with the difficulties of others, and can afford to try to help them. Since this type of compassion is based on understanding rather than on sentimental projections, it is generally appropriate and helpful.

Historically, Buddhism has developed various schools and teachings in order to meet the needs and abilities of different types of people. These schools have perfected many meditative techniques to help clarify and cope with the problems of life, and to help us get in touch with profound and valuable aspects of our bodies and minds. Buddhist meditation practices are always related to practical assessments and to the essential energies and qualities of human experience. And a strong foundation

and balanced orientation is needed in order to progress from basic, preliminary practices to deeper meditative experiences.

For those who have thoroughly implemented the orientation of the Hinayana and Mahayana teachings, Buddhism traditionally offers the Vajrayana as the continuation and final 'path'. The Vajrayana is not a limited doctrine or approach, but rather a path of infinite growth. It completely transcends all dualistic meditations and all conceptualizations. In the Vajrayana, life is seen not as a problem to be resolved, but as an experience that bears infinite richness and creative energy. Nothing is rejected or repressed, since the practitioner of the Vajrayana develops sufficient skill and sensitivity to relate to the beneficial aspect of all existence.

The profound and sensitive nature of the Buddhist teachings was carried to Tibet from India in the eighth century by Shantirakshita and by Padmasambhava, the greatest Vajrayana master of the period. Both teachers are closely associated with the Nyingma or 'Ancient Ones', the first of the four major lineages of Tibetan Buddhism.

The Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana teachings are all contained within Nyingma and are presented in forms that are both flexible and true to the deepest intentions and experiences of each path. Nyingma translations and commentaries based on the Indian texts were made with great attention to the lived significance of each term and idea, so that in carrying these teachings into a new language, such as English, they readily relate to modern life and concepts.

In Tibet, the Nyingma followers interacted with many different types of people—not concentrating on an ex-

clusively monastic orientation—and Nyingma masters have always included people of different attainments and life-styles. When presenting these ideas in America, I have tried to retain this adaptable and open-minded character, and therefore hope that the present volume can offer something of value to people of different positions and interests. My main concern is that the discussions help people to establish a path of growth that is right for them, so that they may take care of themselves in the midst of a troubled world. My lectures do not have a very intellectual or elegant style, but as one of my teachers once said, “Of what importance is lofty speech, if simple speech can get the ideas across?”

I am extremely grateful to all my friends in America who have aided me in my work, and especially to my students, for their many efforts on my behalf. In particular, I would like to thank Judy Robertson and Debby Black for their help in editing these talks, Rosalyn White for illustrating them, and all the staff of Dharma Press for producing them.

I dedicate any benefit deriving from this work to the people of America, and am deeply thankful for having the opportunity to preserve and share with them the Nyingma tradition.

TARTHANG TULKU

Head Lama of the Tibetan  
Nyingma Meditation Center  
and the Nyingma Institute

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Part One

# OPENING



# Impermanence and Frustration

*People are willing to go to war  
and even give up their lives for a cause,  
but they cannot give up  
the causes of their suffering.*

**I**mpermanence is the essence of our human condition. It controls much more than just our lives; it holds sway over the entire cosmos—all the stars and planets, as well as our earthly environment. We can see the effects of impermanence by watching the rise and fall of nations, of our society, and even of the stock market. Impermanence permeates all existence. We can see the changes in our lives and the lives of our friends and families, but the most devastating change in human life—death—is always catching us by surprise.

In this society almost everyone is afraid of death—but to appreciate life fully, we have to face reality. Impermanence and death are integral parts of being alive; this realization can vibrate within us and wake us up . . . we see that although our lives are very dear to us, they do not last forever. To be born a human being is a very rare privilege, and it is important that we appreciate our lives and take advantage of this opportunity.



With an understanding of impermanence, many aspects of life that one ordinarily finds fascinating no longer seem so appealing. We become able to see *through* them and find that they are not actually that satisfying. We can then more easily let go of our attachments and fears, as well as our own little shell of protection. Thinking about the impermanence of life wakes us up; we realize that at this very moment we are actually alive!

Still there is struggle, for we find ourselves wanting things that we know will cause us pain or frustration. Our habit patterns are very hard to break, and even when we try, obstacles always seem to appear—our desires and attachments push us to repeat the same destructive patterns. Our emotional needs habituate us not only to material things, but very subtly to our self-identity. We do not want to lose our sense of control over ourselves, our environment, or even over other people. But until we let go of our attachments to personality and self-image, it is difficult even to see these life patterns, let alone to change them.

Because there are certain attitudes and preferences that we do not like to let go of, we continually get involved in difficult situations and experience inner conflicts. Sometimes we can give up important things—our money, our homes, or property—without much difficulty. But emotional attachments—such as to praise and blame, gain and loss, pleasure and pain, or kind and harsh words—are very subtle. They are beyond the physical level; they exist in the personality or self-image, and we are not willing to let them go. We also have certain attitudes and prejudices, usually hidden, that we do not even like to acknowledge. Our attachments have a magnetic pull which holds us in one place as if we were in prison. It is hard to tell whether this controlling force