



BUDDHISM

One Teacher, Many Traditions

The Dalai Lama
and Thubten Chodron

Foreword by Bhante Gunaratana

PRAISE FOR
Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions

“Originating from a common source in the teachings of the historical Buddha, the southern Theravāda tradition, based on texts in Pāli, and the northern traditions of Tibet and East Asia, based largely on texts originally in Sanskrit, all developed their own unique systems of doctrine and practice. These are impressive in their philosophical insights into the nature of reality and in their understanding of the deep potentials of the human mind. In this book His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the American bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron jointly explore the commonalities and differences among these Buddhist traditions, doing so with exceptional precision. This book will reward those who study it carefully with a deep and wide understanding of the way these traditions have mapped their respective visions of the path to enlightenment.”

—Bhikkhu Bodhi, translator of
In the Buddha’s Words

“His Holiness and Thubten Chodron have collaborated to create an invaluable modern-day resource that explores, illuminates, and clarifies the commonalities, synergies, and divergences within the major historical Dharma streams—especially regarding liberation, an analysis never before done in this way. It also shows how these profoundly ethical teachings can be skillfully applied in our present era to, in their words, serve humanity and benefit sentient beings both within the Buddhist community and beyond. It is a timely offering, at once compelling and wise.”

—Jon Kabat-Zinn, author of *Full Catastrophe Living*

“Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions is like a well-constructed bridge over a beautiful, deep river. People from all traditions will be able to find a clear view of both the Buddha’s teachings and the vast, rich landscape those teachings have nourished. The spirit of respect and harmony expressed in this excellent book is inspiring.”

—Sharon Salzberg, author of *Real Happiness*

“This is an invaluable survey of Buddhist civilizations—with their comprehensive histories, philosophical tenets, ethical disciplines, meditation trainings, and goals to be attained—all elucidated in one volume. A precious gift to all who love the Dharma.”

—Tulku Thondup, coauthor of *Boundless Healing*

“Now that people around the world have unprecedented access to all traditions of Buddhism, a growing number of Buddhists find themselves drawn to theories and practices from different traditions. This makes this book especially valuable, for it presents clear and accurate comparisons between the Pāli-based and Sanskrit-based schools of Buddhism, showing the common ground and significant differences in their interpretations of key themes of the Buddhist path to liberation. I highly recommend this volume for everyone seeking a more global understanding of the many traditions of Buddhism, all inspired by the one Teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni.”

—B. Alan Wallace, author of *The Attention Revolution*

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Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso

THE FOURTEENTH DALAI LAMA

and

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron

Foreword by Bhante Gunaratana



WISDOM PUBLICATIONS • BOSTON

Wisdom Publications
199 Elm Street
Somerville, MA 02144 USA
www.wisdompubs.org

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama XIV, 1935– author.

Buddhism : one teacher, many traditions / Bhikṣhu Tenzin Gyatso,
the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and Bhikṣhu Thubten Chodron.

pages cmj676

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-61429-127-6 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Buddhism—Doctrines. I. Thubten Chodron, 1950– II. Title.

BQ7935.B774B85 2014

294.3'4—dc23

2014007555

ISBN 9781614291275 eISBN 9781614291510

18 17 16 15 14
5 4 3 2 1

Maps on pages xxvi–xxiii by XNR Productions, Inc.

Cover photograph by Vincent Marcil. Cover and interior design by Gopa&Tedz, Inc.

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Foreword

THE DALAI LAMA and I both embarked on our life's work early. He was identified as the leader of Tibetan Buddhism as a toddler, not long before I at age twelve became a monk in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition in my native Sri Lanka. Causes and conditions thus came together for each of us to begin our journeys to preserve and share the wisdom of the Buddha at around the same time.

I first met His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India in 1956 at the Buddhist holy site of Sanchi. He was visiting on one of his first trips outside his homeland, three years before he was forced to flee Tibet. We did not meet again until the 1993 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago. Even though I do not meet him very often, I continue to feel an inner connection with him because of his wisdom and fairness in sharing his Dhamma knowledge. So it is with deep appreciation and admiration of His Holiness's wisdom that I happily offer a few words at the front of this book that His Holiness and Venerable Thubten Chodron have written about our shared Buddhist tradition.

People today are generally more broadminded than those who lived before. Though the world is not without conflict, a unifying trend is emerging as we become more economically and culturally interconnected. Given this current trend, Buddhist unity is overdue. Although we Theravāda Buddhists have long met with other Buddhists, once the panel or conference is over, we go our separate ways, and nothing much happens.

Well-meaning books on the various traditions show our common points but, perhaps in order to be polite, say little about the differences among us. We need not consider it impolite to point out where we differ. Not only are there doctrinal differences among the various types of Buddhists, cultural practices also differ from country to country. Even within a single country, Buddhist practices may vary from region to region or group to group. Being able to honestly survey the traditions is a healthy sign of our strength and

sincerity. There is nothing to hide in the Buddha's teaching. The present work is to be commended for its honest and systematic examination of the great overlap between the Pāli and Sanskrit Buddhist traditions while at the same time not shying away from discussing the many ways in which the teachings diverge.

Still, while it is healthy to discuss our differences openly, focusing on them to the exclusion of our shared heritage is also misguided. Both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions have made tremendous efforts to bring more peace to the world through the sincere preservation of the teachings of the Buddha. It is rare, in either tradition, to find any call for violence to promote one tradition over the other. Thus religious politics is completely foreign to the Buddha's teaching, but sadly some Buddhists fail to practice what their religion teaches. Enthusiasm for the "real" Dhamma is sometimes so strong that the very basic instruction of the Buddha on how to teach the Dhamma without creating conflict is overlooked.

On this point, the *Simile of the Snake* (MN 22) is quite relevant. In this sutta, wrongly grasping the Dhamma is compared to catching a poisonous snake by its tail. A snake will bite and cause death or sickness if held incorrectly, but if the snake is caught correctly, the venom can be extracted for medicine and the snake released without harm. Like this, we must grasp the meaning of Dhamma correctly and not cling to it. Mishandling or clinging to the Dhamma can poison the mind just as a venomous snake can poison the body, and poisoning the mind is much more dangerous.

If we properly grasp the meaning of Dhamma, we can experience what is called the *miracle of education*. Because ignorance is so strong and deep, the Buddha at first wondered whether he would be able to help people understand Dhamma in order to free them from suffering. However, he began to teach, and using his wisdom, he turned vicious persons into saints, wicked persons into holy ones, and murderers into peacemakers. This potential for transformation is the miraculous power of education.

In order to experience the miracle of education for ourselves, we must look within. The truth within us that we can experience all the time is called the Dhamma. It is this Dhamma that invites us saying, "If you want to be free from trouble, look at me. Take care of me." The Dhamma within us talks to us constantly, even if we are not listening. Buddhas need not come to this world for the Dhamma to exist. The buddhas realize it and comprehend it, and having realized it, they teach it and make it known; but

whether it is expounded or not, the Dhamma is there within us to be seen and heard, if we will only wipe the dust from our eyes and look at it.

We “come and see” the experience of peace the moment greed is abandoned. We “come and see” the experience of peace the moment hatred is abandoned. We must build up this habit to “come and see” what is really happening within us without pointing our finger at others. We do not preserve and promote the Buddhist tradition for its sake alone. Rather, we preserve the teachings of the Buddha handed down from generation to generation because they relieve suffering and promote happiness.

When we investigate Buddhism’s major traditions, as the present book does, we can see that they have contributed to the world a rich tapestry of cultural, social, and spiritual knowledge. That knowledge offers deep insights into psychology, philosophy, and mental health. The broad recognition of this has fed today’s global awakening to the importance of meditation. One needn’t be Buddhist to enjoy the benefits that come from the practice of meditation.

Buddhism in all its forms draws the world’s attention for its peaceful existence with other religions. Following this central message of the Buddha, every one of us should be a messenger of peace. This is our common bond. It is my wish that the present volume may help Buddhists everywhere release their clinging to views and engage in honest dialogue with mutual respect and that it may help all beings to experience the truth of the Dhamma that lies within. When our enthusiasm for the Dhamma is guided by love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, we honor the Buddha’s central mission of peace.

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana
 Founding Abbot, The Bhāvanā Society
 High View, West Virginia

Prologue

DUE TO THE great kindness of the Buddha, who taught the Dharma and established the Saṅgha, the teachings showing the path to liberation have been clearly set forth for sentient beings to follow. As the Buddha's doctrine spread throughout the Indian subcontinent and then into other countries, different Buddhist traditions emerged. In ancient times, and even into the modern era, transportation and communication among people from these various traditions were limited. While some may have heard about other traditions, there was no opportunity to check the accuracy of that information. Thus misconceptions arose and passed from one generation to the next.

Due to improvements in transportation and communication, in the twenty-first century, we followers of the Buddha have the opportunity to get to know each other directly. Thanks to new translations, we are now able to read the scriptures of each other's canons and the commentaries by our respective great masters. Since the translations available still represent only a fraction of the total scriptures, and the potential body of the sūtras and commentaries to read is quite extensive, we offer this humble volume as a bridge to begin learning about one another.

All of us Buddhists have the same Teacher, Lord Buddha. It would be to everyone's benefit if we had closer relationships with each other. I have had the great fortune to meet many leaders from the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Jain, and Sikh worlds, but I have had comparatively little opportunity to meet with the great teachers, meditators, and leaders of the different Buddhist traditions. Most Tibetan monastics and lay followers know little about other Buddhist traditions, and I believe the followers of other traditions know little about Buddhism as practiced in the Tibetan community. If our Teacher, the Buddha, came to our planet today, would he be happy with this? All of us, the Buddha's spiritual children, proclaim love for the same "parent," yet we have only minimal communication with our brothers and sisters.

In recent years this has fortunately begun to change. Many Buddhists

from Asia and the West have come to Dharamsala, India, the center of the Tibetan community in exile; some Tibetan monks and nuns have also visited their countries. Communication with our Theravāda brothers and sisters had been particularly minimal, but some cracks in the centuries-old divisions are beginning to appear there as well. For example, two Burmese monks studying at a university in India came to visit me. They were interested in learning about Tibetan Buddhism so they could broaden their knowledge of the Buddhist world while continuing to practice in their own tradition. I admire their motivation, and I would like to encourage Buddhists from all traditions to gain a deeper understanding of the vastness of the Buddha's doctrine. This can only help us to appreciate even more the Buddha's exceptional qualities as a Teacher who has the wisdom, compassion, and skillful means to lead us all to awakening.

A central purpose of this book is to help us learn more about each other. All Buddhists take refuge in the Three Jewels; our teachings are based in the four truths of the āryas (the malaise of *duḥkha*, its origin, cessation, and path), the three higher trainings (ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom), and the four immeasurables (love, compassion, joy, and equanimity). All of us seek liberation from *samsāra*, the cycle of rebirth fueled by ignorance and polluted karma. Learning about our similarities and differences will help us be more united.

Another purpose of this book is to eliminate centuries-old misconceptions about each other. Some Theravāda practitioners believe Tibetan monastics do not follow the *vinaya*—the monastic ethical code—and that as practitioners of tantra, they have sex and drink alcohol. Meanwhile Tibetan practitioners think the Theravāda tradition lacks teachings on love and compassion and characterize those followers as selfish. Chinese Buddhists often think Tibetans perform magic, while Tibetans believe Chinese Buddhists mainly do blank-minded meditation. All of these misconceptions are based on a lack of knowledge. We offer this book as a step toward alleviating these misconceptions.

Now in the twenty-first century East and West, South and North, are coming closer. We Buddhist brothers and sisters must also have closer contact and cultivate mutual understanding. This will benefit us as individuals, will help preserve and spread the Dharma, and will be an example of religious harmony for the world.

Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

June 13, 2014

Preface

A BOOK SHOWING the commonalities and unique points of various Buddhist traditions could have been approached from any number of perspectives. As Buddhists, we all bow to the Buddha, make offerings, and confess our ethical downfalls. We engage in meditation, chanting, study and recitation of sūtras, and listening to teachings. All of our communities have temples, monasteries, hermitages, and centers. Explaining the similarities and differences among these external activities would certainly aid our mutual understanding.

This book, however, focuses on the teachings—the shared tenets and the unique tenets of what we are calling the “Pāli tradition” and the “Sanskrit tradition.” These are terms of convenience and should not be taken to imply that either tradition is homogenous. Both traditions trace their teachings and practices back to the Buddha himself. The Pāli tradition is descendant from the suttas and commentaries in Prakrit, in the old Sinhala language, and in Pāli. It relies on the Pāli canon and is currently found principally in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and parts of Vietnam and Bangladesh. The Sanskrit tradition descends from sūtras and commentaries in Prakrit, Sanskrit, and Central Asian languages and relies on the Chinese and Tibetan canons. It is currently practiced principally in Tibet, China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Nepal, the Himalayan region, Vietnam, and parts of Russia. Both traditions are found in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, India, and in Western and African countries.

While stemming from the same Teacher, the Buddha, the Pāli tradition and the Sanskrit tradition each has its own distinctive features, unique contributions, and different points of emphasis. In addition, neither tradition is monolithic. The Buddhism of East Asia and Tibetan Buddhism, for example, are quite different in expression. But because they both stem from a similar body of Sanskrit texts and share many similar beliefs, they are included in the expression “the Sanskrit tradition.”

Topics in this book are largely described from a prevalent viewpoint in

each tradition. This may differ from how a subtradition or an individual teacher approaches a topic. In some instances, we had to select one presentation among many to put in this book. For example, in the chapter on selflessness (not self), among all the views in the Sanskrit tradition, we explained the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka view as presented by Tsongkhapa. In other cases, we explained a topic—for example, bodhicitta—according to the Tibetan presentation and then gave distinctive features from the Chinese presentation.

There is a tremendous body of literature in both traditions, and deciding what to include in this book was not easy. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and I would have liked to include or elaborate upon many more points, but the book would have become too lengthy. We apologize for not being able to discuss the wide variety of views, interpretations, and practices within each tradition and request your patience if certain topics you consider important are absent or condensed. Quotes from scripture we wanted to include have been omitted due to space concerns, as have titles and epithets.

Many of this book's readers will undoubtedly be learned in their own Buddhist tradition. When reading descriptions, or even textual translations, from traditions different than one's own, the thought may arise, "This is incorrect." At this time please recall that other traditions may use different words to express the same meaning as in one's own tradition. Recall also the benefit arising from knowledge of the diversity of the Buddha's teachings.

This volume was conceived by His Holiness to promote greater mutual understanding among Buddhists worldwide. I feel deeply fortunate that he has trusted me to carry out this most beneficial endeavor. His Holiness contributed most of the teachings from the Sanskrit tradition. I wrote them up from public teachings he gave as well as from a series of private interviews I had with him over the years. These were translated by Geshe Lhakdor, Geshe Dorji Damdul, and Geshe Thupten Jinpa. Geshe Dorji Damdul and Geshe Dadul Namgyal checked this part of the manuscript. Some of the sources for Chinese Buddhism were the writings of Chinese masters such as Zongmi, Yinshun, Hanshan Deqing, Shixian, Jizang, Taixu, and Ouyi Zhixu and interviews with Bhikṣu Houkuan, Bhikṣu Huifeng, Bhikṣu Dharmamitra, Bhikṣu Jian-hu, Dr. Lin Chen-kuo, and Dr. Wan Jing-chuang. Since I received bhikṣuṇī ordination in Taiwan, I have a heart-felt connection with that tradition. Reading the Pāli suttas, the writings of Buddhaghosa and Dhammapāla, and the teachings of contemporary

authors such as Ledi Sayadaw, Ñāṇamoli Thera, Nyanaponika Thera, Soma Thera, Bhikkhu Bodhi, and Bhikkhu Anālayo opened my eyes to the beauty of the Pāli tradition. I studied Bhikkhu Bodhi’s series of 123 talks on the Majjhima Nikāya, and he very generously clarified many points for me in personal correspondence. He also checked the parts of this book describing the Pāli tradition. His Holiness also asked me to visit Thailand and study and practice at a monastery there, which I did for two weeks.

Pāli and Sanskrit are linguistically similar but not identical. Because some terms, such as *meditative stabilization*, are unwieldy in English, the Pāli and Sanskrit terms—here *jhāna* and *dhyāna*—have sometimes been used instead. In some chapters the Pāli and Sanskrit presentations of a topic are given in separate sections; in other chapters they are presented in parallel. Whenever Pāli perspectives are given, the spelling of terms will be in Pāli; Sanskrit perspectives will contain Sanskrit spellings. When two terms are in parentheses, the first is Pāli, the second Sanskrit. When only one term is present, either it is the same in both languages, or it corresponds with the tradition whose perspective is discussed in that passage. Pāli and Sanskrit terms are usually given in parentheses only for the first usage of a word. When Pāli and Sanskrit terms are left untranslated, only initial usages are italicized.

The English “four noble truths” has been replaced by a more accurate translation—“four truths of the āryas (*ariyas*),” which is often abbreviated to “four truths.”

There are several English terms that followers of the Pāli tradition may find different than what they are used to. On the first occurrence of such terms, I tried to reference the more familiar English term. There will be translation choices for Sanskrit words that are unfamiliar to some readers as well. This is unavoidable, and I request your tolerance.

All errors, inconsistencies, and any points that may be inappropriate are due to my ignorance alone, and I request your patience with these. They do not in any way reflect on His Holiness.

APPRECIATION

I pay homage to the Buddha as the Teacher, he who gave us these precious Dharma teachings that make our lives meaningful and lead us to true freedom from duḥkha. I also pay homage to the lineages of realized Buddhist

- RA *Ratnāvalī* by Nāgārjuna. Translated by John Dunne and Sara McClintock in *The Precious Garland: An Epistle to a King* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997).
- SN Saṃyutta Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000).
- TP *Treatise on the Pāramīs*, from the *Commentary to the Cariyā-piṭaka*. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi on www.accesstoinsight.org.
- Ud *Udāna*
- Vism *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in *The Path of Purification* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991).

Publisher's Acknowledgment

THE PUBLISHER gratefully acknowledges the generous contribution of the Hershey Family Foundation toward the publication of this book.