

The teachings of the Buddha offer a path to complete liberation from suffering—

the chance for ultimate happiness. They offer the method and wisdom to enable us to transform ourselves into bringers of profound benefit to the world. In these times of global distress and confusion, they offer Dharma students grounding and orientation and a sense of safety and purpose. As Buddhists, we recognize the connection between our minds and the world around us. We have insight into how transformation, both personal and global, is possible.

But there are more than are seven billion people living on Earth now, and only about seven percent of them are Buddhist. In these times of global strife, what can Buddhism offer to the rest of the world to help pacify suffering and bring about peace?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has spent many years considering this question and has addressed it in several books. In *Beyond Religion: Ethics in Our Shared World*, His Holiness offers his observations on the causes for global problems and the solutions we can enact to create a better world. Using language free of explicitly Buddhist terms, he describes the root for our global concerns:

At my residence in Dharamsala, the hill station in northern India which has been my home since the early 1960s, it is my daily habit to rise early, normally at around 3:30 A.M. After some hours of mental exercises and contemplations, I generally listen to the world news on the radio. Most often, I tune in to the BBC World Service. It is a routine I have followed for many years, as a way of staying in touch with events around the world.

As I listen to the constant stream of reports about money and finance, about crises, conflicts, and war, if often strikes me that the complex problems we face in the world—problems of corruption, environment, politics, and so on—almost always indicate a failure of moral ethics and inner values. At every level we see

a lack of self-discipline. Many problems are also due to failure of discernment, of shortsightedness or narrow-mindedness.

Of course the causes and conditions of particular problems can be immensely complex. The seeds of ethnic violence, rebellion, and war, for example, almost invariably date back decades or even centuries. But still, if we are really interested in tackling our problems at their roots—whether we are talking about human conflict, poverty, or environmental

destruction—we have to recognize that they are ultimately related to issues of ethics. Our shared problems do not fall from the sky, nor are they created by some higher force. For the most part, they are products of human action and human error. If human action can create these problems in the first place, then surely we humans must have the capacity as well as the responsibility to find their solutions. The only way we can put them right is by changing our outlook and our ways, and by taking action.

When His Holiness talks about "changing our outlook and our ways," he is talking about transforming our minds. The failure of moral ethics and inner values, which allows for humans to take harmful actions, comes from the mind.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche also makes it clear that the mind is the source of global problems. Whether discussing war, famine, disease, torture, economic problems, wildfires, windstorms, floods, earthquakes, and so forth, Rinpoche always points to the mind as

Our shared problems do not fall from the sky, nor are they created by some higher force. For the most part, they are products of human action and human error.

the source of our problems. "It's called 'natural disaster,' but it's not natural. It comes from the mind," Rinpoche told representatives of the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom in an interview in Bodhgaya, India, in December 2011:

It comes from the minds of people, the minds of the beings who are living in this world. Whatever they experience, good or bad, comes from their minds. Their good experiences come from their good minds, good hearts. The bad experiences come from their bad minds, bad hearts. It's so simple. It's not natural. In other words, it comes from *lendre*.



"Le" is the "action," "dre" is "result." Action, effect, action, effect. Effect comes through the action. After the action, then there's the effect. Good and bad depend on whether the action is bad or good.

So in order to address the world's difficulties, from the Buddhist perspective, we must look first at our own individual minds. An understanding of how our minds work is critical to taking correct action to create the causes and conditions for resolving global problems. This understanding of the mind is revealed through studying and reflecting on the teachings of the Buddha and through the guidance of qualified teachers.

Ven. Thubten Gyatso, a long-time student of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche and a registered FPMT teacher, explains in his article "Karma: Is the World Ready to Understand?" (see page 28) the dynamic between the mind and our problems and how we move along the path towards developing our inner qualities:

Buddhism asserts that all disharmony in the world begins in our minds. Born unaware of the true nature of our own self, our minds fabricate mistaken identities of self and others. Childishly self-centered, we see our own needs as more important than the needs of others, and subsequent turbulent emotions of self-importance, anger, desire, pride, greed, and jealousy destroy our happiness and create misery. The spiritual path involves transforming those disturbing emotions into the peaceful and virtuous attitudes of love, compassion, and wisdom. The ethical conduct of non-harmfulness towards others is the foundation of that path, and freedom from self-

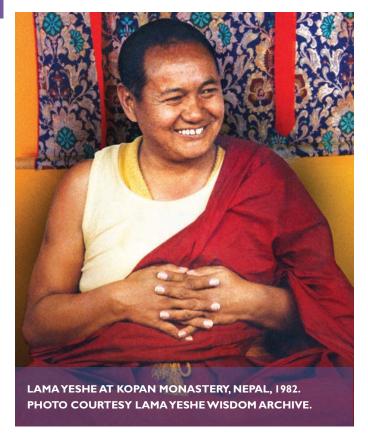
centeredness is ultimately attained through deep understanding of how we exist in reality.

In dependence upon the guidance of a qualified spiritual friend, every individual can liberate his or her mind from disturbing emotions by progressively cultivating the altruistic attitude of universal compassion supported by the wisdom seeing the reality of how all things, persons and non-persons, exist. Buddhist teachings are a guide for individuals to attain inner peace and strength as the foundation for altruism. They are not a document for direct peace within society, but, as we are the components of society, when we attain inner peace, the more peaceful our society will become.

In other words, creating a more peaceful world happens through transforming individual minds. Whether we are wishing to address societal conflict or environmental problems, we need to have a peaceful mind.

Samdhong Rinpoche, a lharampa geshe who served as the prime minister for the Tibetan government in exile from 2001-2011, is a politically astute observer of global issues. In his book *Uncompromising Truth for a Compromised World: Tibetan Buddhism and Today's World*, he emphasizes that the degree of our success as we engage with external problems is tied to our inner development:

One final thing I want to add here is that the outer environment is prevented from preservation due to the degradation of our inner environment. Unless we are able to improve our inner environment our efforts will not be very fruitful. Therefore, each individual should try to improve



their inner environment and at the same time to act to preserve or improve the outer environment. Both should go hand in hand, otherwise we are only improving our outer environment, and this will carry us only so far.

We need to keep this strongly in our minds as global citizens concerned about the state of the world. When looking for leadership and developing plans to take on the world's problems, without a clear understanding that one's inner qualities determine the success of one's other actions, our work will be less fruitful.

What all of these teachers are pointing toward is the necessity of education that helps us develop our mind or inner environment. In other words, through education and training, we can develop strong, healthy minds that have the qualities that lead to both inner and outer peace. And in order to make a difference on a global scale, this education needs to be made available to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

One of the key things His Holiness emphasizes in talks around the world is that Buddhist education to develop inner qualities, which are grounded in the ancient Indian tradition of the Nalanda masters, can be taught in a non-religious way. Similarly, FPMT founder Lama Yeshe articulated this view when describing his vision for Universal Education:

Buddhism contains teachings on both the universal attitude and the nature of universal reality. So we need to take these teachings and shape them such that their language is intelligible to people the world over. That is important. That is the way in which we can contribute. And our students are the main resources for putting this into action. They have a realistic point of view and the dedication to make it happen, to help others to understand.

Through the work of many devoted FPMT students, Universal Education has developed over the years into the creation of curricula and programs that provide the essential teachings of the Buddha in a form that can be taught to anyone of any age, regardless of religious faith.

For the last twelve years, the Foundation for Developing Compassion and Wisdom (FDCW), an international FPMT project, has played a key role in carrying Universal Education forward and is recognized as the main contributor to the Universal Education pillar of the FPMT Five Pillars of Service. (Dharma education, social or community service, interfaith activities, and income generating activities comprise the other four pillars.) With an international faculty of facilitators, FDCW's courses and workshops are suitable for FPMT centers as well as non-Dharma environments. The organization is currently positioned to take a leadership role in the growing field of Buddhist-inspired, secular education.

In the 2011 interview in Bodhgaya, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who serves as FDCW's honorary president, described the importance of Universal Education and how it can bring benefit:

Of course, the aim is for a better world, a better universe, for a happier, more peaceful life, and more meaningful life—not harming each other, but helping, benefiting, bringing happiness to each other. That's what it is. Bringing the self and whole world into higher and higher happiness. That is the aim.

Everybody in the world cannot become Buddhist, cannot become Muslim, cannot become Hindu, and so forth. But you need to bring some method, or education, [appropriate for people of any religious background] to this world in order to create a better life, a better world, and more happiness, and to solve all the problems and the cause of unhappiness. So, I thought that [in addition to Buddhist education] we need to bring another method to use in the world. So I thought of Universal Education, which Lama Yeshe started. I thought how important it is to offer something for the general public to accept and that makes sense. I see more and more how important this is.

Since Lama Yeshe introduced this vision nearly thirty-five years ago, FPMT as an organization has been making great progress in providing Universal Education to a wide variety of people—both children and adults—around the world.

A UNIVERSAL APPROACH TO KARMA

According to Buddhist teachings, developing an awareness of karma is integral to developing an understanding of our minds. When Lama Zopa Rinpoche talks about "action, effect, action, effect," he is talking about karma, about how actions come from the mind, creating the causes and conditions for other actions and outcomes.

When considering global issues, like global warming and climate change, Rinpoche regularly points out cause and effect, connecting these problems to our mind and our actions:

Regarding global warming, usually the real cause, karma, isn't talked about. The reality is: nothing happens without relating to the mind. People think, "This is a natural disaster," but it doesn't happen without a cause, and the main cause is karma.

Generally, it comes from everyone's karma and, of course, there are conditions, such as pollution from cars, etc., that we commonly understand. But we have to understand there *is* a reason, and that is our past negative thoughts and actions. There is so much negative karma created in the world—so many animals are killed, for example. When a new disease is identified and it comes from a chicken, bird, or cow, then automatically millions of them are killed. If it were humans, we would never think of killing them. Even if one human has a virus, we would never kill him or her. Of course, we don't normally talk of karma in a general situation regarding the environment, but it is important to educate people.¹



For Buddhists, studying and meditating on karma is essential in order to make progress on the path to enlightenment. Ven. Gyatso offers this brief explanation on its centrality to attaining buddhahood:

Whatever we think, do, or say always comes with a purpose or intention. A virtuous purpose is doing something to help

others motivated by kindness, generosity, compassion, and so on. A non-virtuous purpose is doing something for our own benefit motivated by self-centeredness, desire, hostility, and so on. Neutral purposes are where there is no overt selfcenteredness or intended benefit for others. Performing the intended action affects both the object of our action as well as our mind. Karmic potencies are established upon the mind with the potential to initiate future intentions that will connect our mental continuum with experiences similar to the actions that created those potencies. Virtuous, non-virtuous, and neutral potencies will lead to pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral experiences respectively. This is the cause-and-effect process called karma. Every experience in our life, pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, comes from the ripening of a karmic potency. If the potency for a particular experience does not exist on the mind, such an experience can never happen.

There are four types of karmic result: rebirth result, result similar to the cause in terms of experience, result similar to the cause in terms of habitual behavior, and the environmental result. The entire universe and its inhabitants, the sentient beings, all manifest in dependence upon karma. By destroying self-grasping ignorance through wisdom, and self-centeredness through universal compassion, we can rise above karma and attain our full potential of buddhahood and always be there to guide others on the path out of suffering.

Having an understanding of karma can help Buddhist students accept and transform the situations they find themselves in, even in the most difficult of times. It also can be helpful when looking at events on a larger scale. For example, when considering why a certain political candidate gets elected, the concept of group karma can offer powerful insights.

For non-Buddhists, the essence of karma—the principle of cause and effect—is also meaningful and can be universally understood. Contemplation on actions and their results without reference to past and future lives can bring about changes of attitude and action.

In an interview previously published in *Mandala* December 2005-January 2006, Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman discusses when to apply an understanding of karma to greatest benefit and provides an example of how a view that embraces the understanding of cause and effect *and* that teaches personal responsibility can empower us to change our reactions to suffering and be profoundly beneficial. After the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Thurman had this to say:

Abstractly speaking, karma is not really a theory of fate; it's a causal theory. And it says that anything bad that happens to you is a resonance of something bad that you perpetrated in a previous life.

The main thing about what we might want to call collective karma—for example, when there's a disaster where a terrible thing happens from nature—is that the bodhisattva, or the outside person looking at the situation, should never invoke the karma theory and say, "Well, I don't have to worry about the people affected because that was their bad karma and they got wasted and too bad"—as if it were some sort of fate or a way of writing off the disaster. It should never be used that way.

The bodhisattva never accepts the absoluteness of that explanation, although she would be aware of it. She would think of it as a terrible tragedy, unprovoked and unmerited, and would try to do everything possible to save the people from the disaster and help the survivors.

On the other hand, the karma theory that everything bad that happens to me is from my own negative action in the past is always useful for the person who suffers. In other words, using the karma theory to blame the victim is good for the victim to do *about themselves*.

This is a very surprising idea. If the victims just sit and shake their fist at the universe, shout at God (if they are theists) or shout at karma, then they weaken themselves in the sense that they have just emphasized their helplessness. Whereas it is beneficial if they say, I'm going to use this disaster that happened to me as if it were expiating previous negative actions, and I'm going to grow stronger from it. In other words, I can't do anything about the disaster but I can do something about my reaction to it. I'm not going to add to the suffering it has caused with a new suffering of agonizing about myself and feeling helpless and feeling angry at the external world. Instead, I'm going to take responsibility for being in the way of the disaster as part of my own karma and therefore I'm going to use this tragedy to my advantage, helping me move toward freedom, toward buddhahood.

In addition, in situations of political conflict, war, and terrorism, reflecting on karma will lead us to see the dangers of violence and how engaging in acts of violence can perpetuate more violence. Inspirational figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., two well-known non-Buddhists who led successful struggles against oppression, made strong arguments for non-violence based on a recognition of cause and effect.

His Holiness articulated this idea, in a response to the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, and offers a constructive alternative:

Terrorism cannot be overcome by the use of force because force does not address the complex underlying problems. In fact, the use of force may not only fail to solve the problems, it may exacerbate them and frequently leaves destruction and suffering in its wake. Human conflicts do not arise out of the blue. We must continue to develop a wider perspective, to think rationally and work to avert future disasters in a non-violent way. These issues concern the whole of humanity, not just one country. We should explore the use of non-violence as a long-term measure to control terrorism of every kind. But we need a well-thought-out, coordinated long-term strategy. The proper way of resolving differences is through dialogue, compromise, and negotiations, through human understanding and humility. We need to appreciate that genuine peace comes about through mutual understanding, respect, and trust.

His Holiness also explains here the basis for bridging different cultural and religious outlooks and for resolving conflicts in a non-



THE BUDDHA TELLS THE STORY OF THE FOUR HARMONIOUS
FRIENDS—A PHEASANT, A RABBIT, A MONKEY, AND AN
ELEPHANT—WHO LIVED TOGETHER IN HARMONY. EACH OF THE
YOUNGER ANIMALS SHOWED RESPECT FOR THE OLDER ANIMALS'
LIFE-EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE BY CARRYING THE OLDER
ON HIS BACK. LATER, THE ELDEST (THE PHEASANT) TAUGHT THE
PRACTICE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT TO THE OTHERS, WHO THEN
TAUGHT THE SAME PRACTICE TO THE REST OF THE FOREST
CREATURES. BECAUSE OF THIS, HAPPINESS AND COMFORT
INCREASED GREATLY IN THE WORLD.
ILLUSTRATION BY LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

violent manner. Understanding the mind and cause and effect underlies our ability to develop mutual understanding, respect, and trust. This enables dialogue and the identification of shared values, which are the building blocks for lasting peace. By educating the world in the essential teachings of the Buddha, we are creating the possibilities for this to happen in our families, communities, nations, and throughout the world.

THE PERSONAL AND THE GLOBAL

Positive global change depends on individuals changing their minds. The teachings of the Buddha contain all that is needed to transform oneself into the most profoundly beneficial being, a fully enlightened buddha. But most of the world is not Buddhist, so the philosophies, mind science, and techniques of Buddhism need to be made available to non-Buddhists in

secular ways to support global transformation. His Holiness, Lama Yeshe, and Lama Zopa Rinpoche as well as many others share this vision.

On the following pages, you can read stories that further explore these ideas and also learn about FPMT students around the world who have taken the advice of their teachers to heart. In particular, through developing Universal Education programs and projects, students are sharing the essence of Dharma with children, young adults, parents, hospice workers, lawyers, and countless others. Students are also taking their practice into society by helping migrants, the elderly, the sick, and so many others in need.

The act of changing the world happens through changing our minds. With the blessings and guidance of our precious teachers, may we all successfully engage in this work and bring benefit to all beings.

WHAT IS THE MIND?

By Ven. Thubten Gyatso, from "Karma: Is the World Ready to Understand?"

DEFINITION OF THE MIND

The term "mind" refers to our ongoing, moment-by-moment stream of subjective awareness, or experience. It includes awareness of the outer world through our five senses, as well as inner awareness of thoughts, happiness, unhappiness, and pleasant and unpleasant emotions. Mind is defined as "the mere continuum of clarity and awareness." In general, "clarity" refers to the nonphysical nature of mind. Awareness has no material dimension, color, or shape. At a deeper level, clarity is the activity of appearance: when we become aware of something, an image of the known object appears to awareness like a reflection appearing in a mirror. Mental appearances are potentially accurate, but we never experience things completely accurately because, like distorted reflections arising in a twisted mirror, our ordinary awareness is distorted by disturbing emotions and mistaken preconceptions. Such distortions of reality, however, are superficial and are not the underlying clear nature of mind. When, through the power of meditation, disturbing emotions and preconceptions are abandoned, awareness becomes clear and accurate.

"Awareness" is not possessed by mirrors. It is the activity of subjective apprehension, knowing, or cognitive engagement in the five sense objects or objects appearing to thought. Clarity and awareness of a particular object of mind occur simultaneously.



The term, "mere," excludes an independent, self-reliant "I" or mind within the head that is an agent having or controlling the experience.

DIVISIONS OF MIND

Mind, consciousness, and awareness are synonyms. There are six main divisions of mind: the five sense consciousnesses and mental consciousness. The latter is the main center of subjective experiential activity. It is the thoughts, feelings, and emotions related to what has been experienced through the senses or by ideas alone. Memory, knowledge, sleep, correct and incorrect ideas, feelings of happiness, unhappiness and neutral feelings, and

¹ From "Environment and Meditation," posted on Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive (lamayeshe.com) in October 2009.

emotions, constructive such as love and destructive such as hatred, all belong to mental consciousness.

Buddhism asserts that mind is not an independent agent that performs the functions of thinking, knowing, feeling, willing, and so on. Mind is those functions. Mind is only nominally existent, it is not some ethereal substance existing independently in its own right; it is simply what we call the continuum of clarity and awareness. This illustrates the most important tenet of Buddhist philosophy: all things in the universe, both persons and their surroundings, are only nominally existent. If we try to locate any named object on its basis of designation, nothing can be found to be that object in itself. Whatever exists does so in dependence upon something else, and never in its own right. This is important because the root of all suffering is the innate, mistaken conception that our own self does exist independently in its own right.

Introspection, awareness of our own mind, is the only way to observe mind. There is no physical instrument that can directly observe clarity and awareness. Those who believe they are observing mind when their instruments show regions of the brain light up during thought or emotional activity are as far away from observing mind as a paleontologist is from observing a dinosaur by seeing fossilized footprints.

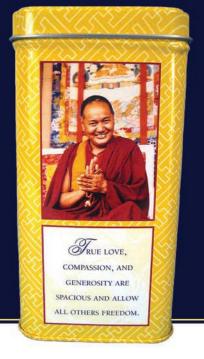
Awareness is not a simple thing. Each moment of awareness bears memory imprints of this life and past lives, habitual

tendencies of past constructive or destructive emotions, and karmic potencies created by past intentional actions. These imprints, habits, and potencies have a profound influence on the way things appear in our mind, and the way in which they are apprehended. Also, the ways in which things appear to and are apprehended by mind are influenced by whatever emotion, constructive or destructive, is manifest at the time of observation.

If awareness is both a conditioned and a subjective phenomenon, how can we claim to see reality if our observations are subjectively conditioned? No problem. We are intelligent beings. Knowledge acquired through hearing, contemplating, and meditatively analyzing correct presentations of reality will oppose subjective distortion due to mistaken ideas, and will enhance the power of correct ideas. Finally, the wisdom of direct, nonconceptual awareness of reality based upon shamatha, mental quiescence, will oppose all mental imprints associated with ignorance-confusion and will begin the permanent extinguishment of distorting mental imprints, habits, and karmic potencies. Obscuring mental turbulence will cease, and our mind will come to abide in its natural state of perfect clarity and tranquility, seeing reality without subjective distortion.

You can read the article "Karma: Is the World Ready to Understand?" in its entirety with Mandala's online content for this issue: fpmt.org/mandala/this-issue/.

create merits at home, benefit Dharma communities around the world



Order your free Merit Box

The International Merit Box Project is an at-home generosity practice that benefits Dharma projects around the world. For over 15 years, students in the FPMT community have been making offerings into their Merit Boxes and creating vast merits.

These offerings in turn have lead to over US\$1 million in grants that helped build holy objects, support others on retreat, fund new Dharma publications & libraries, and a wide variety of other compassionate activities.

Just think: gradual offerings of spare change into your Merit Box can help create a new stupa or Dharma text!



fpmt.org/projects/fpmt/merit-box/