



The Essence of
Jung's
Psychology
and
Tibetan
Buddhism

Western and Eastern Paths to the Heart

Radmila Moacanin

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& TIBETAN BUDDHISM



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Preface to the Second Edition

*If some great idea takes hold of us from outside,
we must understand that it takes hold of us
only because something in us responds to it,
and goes out to meet it.*

—C. G. Jung

Since this book was first published much has happened in our world that makes the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism and the work of Jung even more relevant. The past century ended and the new one was ushered in with an explosion of violence, indiscriminate killing, and revenge: the eye-for-an-eye attitude that—as Gandhi said—leads to a blind world. In addition, our planet, the only habitat we have, one that we share with all other living beings, has been deeply wounded: earth, water, and air have been poisoned by mindless exploitation and by man-made instruments of destruction, all in pursuit of power and self-centered interests.

In the last decade or so we have seen enormous and increasingly accelerated advances in technology with relatively few advances in the spiritual realm. Militarism, materialism, and consumerism have run amok to the point of drowning Western civilization and rapidly infecting the rest of humanity. Together they emphasize the external and disregard the inner world. As a result our world is not only blind but unconscious and asleep.

There are, however, some signs in Western culture—albeit a minority subculture—of a slowly emerging trend, a paradigm shift beyond scientific materialism to greater self-awareness and mental receptivity; to interest in meditation and the intersection of psychology and spirituality; to examining one's values and simplifying one's life, including career changes, for a more fulfilling existence; in brief, there is a trend away from *Logos*—the pure intellect that analyzes, judges, and divides—to *Eros*, which relates and connects, and brings the realization of our interconnectedness and interdependence. This shift touches our depths, opening us to larger dimensions, to the ineffable mystery of life and death, and leading us to the spiritual transformation that Tibetan Buddhism and the work of Jung are all about.

The mere fact that this book has gone through three printings and two editions and has been translated into eleven languages shows that there is a hunger for the perennial wisdom of East and West as eloquently expressed both by Tibetan Buddhism and by Jung.

Tibetan Buddhism has become relatively well known, especially since 1989 when the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Today he is regarded by many as the world's greatest and most inspiring religious leader, thanks to his unwavering commitment to nonviolence, his unconditional respect for human life, and his reverence for all living beings and the environment within which they live. Jung, however, is still not properly understood, and his vital contributions have not been fully recognized even by Western psychology.

This second edition includes an epilogue in which I explore a few of the most significant topics at the intersection of Jung's psychology and Tibetan Buddhism, with special emphasis on their relevance to our present world.

Preface

This book had its origins in Europe, when some years ago the Tibetan Buddhist master, Lama Thubten Yeshe, flew West from Asia to give teachings, and I flew East from America to receive them. One day in a private interview with him, knowing of my interest in Jung, he asked me unexpectedly to give a talk on Jung's psychology and its relation to Tibetan Buddhism. I protested: I was totally unprepared and knew so little about it. But Lama gently insisted. Frightened, I kept pleading with him to be excused from such an impossible task, but he was relentless and would not hear of it. For the first and only time in my acquaintance with Lama Yeshe, I truly believed we had failed to communicate. Little did I know what was to follow.

Later that very same day I quietly sat cross-legged on the floor of the meditation room in front of a large audience of Lama Yeshe's students and proceeded to deliver the talk. It turned out to be a memorable and a major event in my life. From then on I was gripped by the urge to learn and experience more of the two traditions. I began traveling on that exciting journey East and West, West and East, and in my mind, each of the two disciplines supplemented, helped explain further, and enriched the other. As a result, a few years later this book was produced. Synchronistically, just as it came into being in California, Lama Yeshe arrived there after a long absence. I showed him the work, and he immediately encouraged me to have it published. Once again I was reluctant, but once again it was a task from which I could not be excused.

The book attempts to draw parallels, and discuss similarities and differences, between Tibetan Buddhism and Jung's psychology. The purpose is to identify possible connections so as to make a bridge between some aspects of Eastern and Western philosophical and spiritual traditions, psychological and ethical systems.

One of the main problems I want to investigate is the following: since the two traditions have developed at different historical times, under vastly different sociocultural conditions and geographically at two opposite sides of the world, are they intrinsically discrete and of psychological and ethical value only to the people where each developed? Or is it possible to reconcile the two traditions, "bring the twain together," allow a cross-fertilization, synthesize and adapt the findings, methods, and wisdom of the respective systems to the needs and conditions of contemporary society, regardless of geographical boundaries?

Other related questions that I will put forward for investigation are as follows. Are there possible dangers inherent in allowing the Westerner to experiment with long-established and deeply rooted Eastern traditions? Are those dangers due basically to transplantation of spiritual discipline from one culture to another—from East to West—in the way the reverse occurred when Western industrial technology was introduced

in so-called underdeveloped countries of the East, causing disruption of traditional patterns of living and working and consequently often serious damage to the psychological equilibrium of the individuals concerned? Or are the dangers even more fundamental, like those the alchemists knew and warned us about—that their *opus* was “like a death-dealing poison,” meaning not only hazards of chemical poisoning but also of mental aberrations. What then are the necessary precautions and safeguards, if any, in approaching the studies and practices of an Eastern spiritual discipline that has been kept secret for centuries and has only recently been revealed to the Western world?

C. G. Jung, the alchemists, and Tibetan Buddhists, have they all been in search of the same truth—Self, Philosopher’s Stone, enlightenment? Have their works a common core that, if properly understood and practiced, contains a universal value?

Is there a meaningful coincidence in the eighth-century prophecy that “when the iron birds will fly the Tibetans will leave their home,” the prophecy being fulfilled in the very twentieth century that brought C. G. Jung to us?

Many Tibetans have found a new home in Switzerland, one of the most congenial places for them outside of Tibet, viewing the same Alps that inspired Jung and that are reminiscent of their own Himalayas, surroundings and visions particularly conducive for the mind to meditate and expand.

Some years back, under the impact of the very same force that made the Tibetans leave their home, I too had to leave mine, and found temporarily a new home in Switzerland. It was there that my first interest in Eastern mystical traditions was born. It was in Switzerland also that I had my first encounter with the Dalai Lama. Since meeting Tibetan lamas, I have often felt grateful, in a strange way, to that “evil” force that was directly instrumental in bringing us together. For me this represented a striking example of the possibility of experiencing that “thought transformation” that the Tibetans teach, and a demonstration of the multidimensional aspects of every event.

I came into contact both with the work of Jung and with Tibetan Buddhism very spontaneously, and in each case as the result of a series of synchronistic events. Both systems had an immediate and strong impact on me, and I had an intimation that somehow they must be related in a profoundly significant way, despite the fact that they were rooted in different traditions and developed under different outward circumstances.

In this book I shall try to encompass general areas of Jung’s psychology and Tibetan Buddhism. These are subject matters of immense scope and complexity, in both theory and practice, and voluminous works have been produced in each of the areas. Therefore my study shall be limited to only certain issues dealt with by Jung, and the relation of alchemy to his own findings. The discussion of Buddhism will focus on tantric Buddhism and its relation to Jung’s psychology. I can hardly discuss tantric Buddhism, however, without placing it in the broader context of Tibetan Buddhism in general. This is the rationale for giving a brief overview of Tibetan Buddhism. The rationale for discussing tantric Buddhism and relating it to Jung’s psychology is based on my impression that this particular form of Buddhism is most directly concerned with the issues and problems that preoccupied Jung throughout his life—above all, the process of the growth of consciousness and spiritual transformation. Jung refers to it as

“the tremendous experiment of becoming conscious, which nature has laid upon mankind, and which unites the most diverse cultures in a common task.”

Despite its intricate complexity and esoteric nature, Tibetan Buddhism is essentially a psychological and ethical system. And unlike other philosophical theories and spiritual approaches that have come to us from Asia, tantric Buddhism is very much a living process, bridging the gap between our deepest yearnings for symbolic and spiritual mystery, and the demands of our mundane life, always stressing that the meaning of life is in living it.

I hope to arrive at some solutions to a few fundamental issues examined, and that the results will demonstrate and point to interconnections between the two systems. I hope to be able to show that it is possible to reconcile an ancient Eastern spiritual discipline with a contemporary Western psychological system in a fruitful and meaningful way.

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My profound gratitude and heartfelt thanks to my teachers, Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, who showed me the path to another reality; to Dr. Ira Progoff, who introduced me to the world of Jung; to Dr. Russell Lockhart: with his guidance the horizons of that multidimensional world expanded beyond all boundaries; to my mother, who patiently gave me invaluable help and support; to many friends and strangers in Europe and Asia, the Americas, Africa, and Australia, who with their hearts and minds contributed to this work in many different ways.

[1 Buddhism](#)

Once upon a time, in a far-off land there was a prince who had a beautiful wife and a young son. He was called Siddhartha Gautama. He had lived all his life in a big palace and according to his father's wishes never left the palace. His father, the king, was determined to protect his son and heir from seeing any misery and to offer him all the worldly pleasures of life. Indeed, Siddhartha tasted to the full all the worldly pleasures of life.

But one day he disobeyed his father's strict orders never to leave the palace grounds. With his devoted companion and charioteer Channa, he passed beyond the gate and ventured into the world. He came across an old man, a sick man, and a dead man—three sights totally unknown to the young prince. He asked Channa whether he ever saw anything like that. Channa answered that old age, sickness, and death must come to all of us. For the first time in his life, Siddhartha was wounded by the arrow of a new awareness: the suffering of all humanity from which there is no escape. Finally, the fourth and decisive sight Siddhartha encountered was that of a wandering holy man. He no longer had a choice: the inner urgency, his newly discovered calling, was overwhelming, and he too had to leave his home, his royal life, and everything he cherished, including his parents, his beautiful wife, and small son.

Silently he left the royal palace for good to embark alone on a long journey in pursuit of answers to the riddle of life. In his wanderings he met many famous learned teachers and philosophers; he studied with them and followed their methods. But none of the learned men could answer his own questions, for these were no ordinary questions, not formulated in his head, but felt deeply in his heart, searching not for philosophical and metaphysical speculations but the living truth. So, Siddhartha continued his solitary journey searching for his treasure, the only treasure he so desperately wanted, and for which he was determined once more to sacrifice everything.

For many years he lived in the forest as a hermit endeavoring to gain control over his body and his mind. He was successful in his efforts, but the results were a starved, extremely weakened body and a discouraged mind, while the treasure he was seeking still eluded him. At the depth of hopelessness Siddhartha realized that his body was his most precious instrument, not to be abused through ascetic practices any more than through sense indulgence, both of which he had known so well. It was through his human body—and through it alone—that he could reach the treasure hard to find. Now it was time for the former prince and the former ascetic to change his life again, to abandon the way of self-denial and enter a more balanced path—the Middle Path. So, he took a meal, bathed, put on fresh clothes. Siddhartha then sat cross-legged under a

tree to meditate and vowed not to remove himself from this spot till he found the treasure. And indeed after many days of sitting under the tree the treasure came to him: in a flash of illumination he attained enlightenment, the living truth he had been searching for. At that moment Siddhartha became the Buddha, the Awakened One.

He lived a long life bringing the treasure he discovered to many people, young and old, rich and poor, learned and uneducated, to everyone and anyone who was ready to discover the treasure for himself; for the treasure was to be found nowhere else but within the depth of each individual mind. His mortal body died at the age of eighty or so. But Prince Siddhartha Gautama—the Buddha—lived happily ever after in the minds and hearts of millions of human beings who accepted his message and made it a living reality.

This is the tale of Shakyamuni Buddha, probably one of the oldest, most often repeated, most fantastic of all tales. It has been told and has inspired countless human beings for two and a half millennia.

What was the message that Shakyamuni Buddha brought to the world? Above all that each human being has the potential to attain enlightenment and become a buddha. “Man is his own master, and there is no higher being or power that sits in judgment over his destiny.”¹ Buddha, and his followers to this day, can only teach, guide, point to the path to liberation; each person must enter and walk the path alone, just as Siddhartha did. One must maintain a healthy doubt about the teachings one receives, no matter who the authority, including the Buddha, until their validity is clearly confirmed through investigation, analysis, and experience. Only when we have discovered that the teachings are valuable and applicable to our own life should we follow them. Ultimately, we are our own authority in the spiritual quest; there is no revealed truth, sacred scripture, no dogma and no savior.

The essence of Buddha’s teaching and the foundation of all subsequent Buddhist doctrine was expressed in his first sermon delivered at Sarnath, near Benares, after his enlightenment on the night of the full moon of July. In it he expounded the four noble truths:

1. suffering in life is ubiquitous;
2. the source of suffering is to be found in selfish craving and attachment of all kinds;
3. cessation, liberation, freedom from suffering is possible;
4. the path leading from suffering to liberation.

The four noble truths doctrine further elaborates on this path, generally referred to as the Middle Way because it is free from all extremes. It is also called the noble eightfold path as it specifies rules of behavior, in thought, speech, and action that lead to liberation. They are:

1. right understanding
2. right thought—purpose or aspiration
3. right speech
4. right action
5. right livelihood

6. right effort
7. right mindfulness, awareness, attentiveness
8. right concentration, or meditation

These eight categories constitute the foundations of Buddhist training, which when properly applied and followed lead to a balanced and harmonious life, benefiting both individual and society. The first two categories—right understanding and right thought—have to do with development of wisdom; the next three—right speech, right action, and right livelihood—with ethical conduct; and the last two—right mindfulness, and right concentration—with mental discipline.

Wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline are interrelated and are to be pursued simultaneously, each promoting the development of the other. Thus the philosophical, ethical, and psychological components together constitute the foundation for spiritual development.²

In the subsequent centuries, from this simple yet very profound exposition of the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path pronounced by Shakyamuni Buddha, a staggering amount of interpretations through oral commentaries and written material evolved, often contradictory and conflicting. Some deal with plain practical issues, some with highly philosophical, metaphysical, and ontological problems, but they all claim to derive their authority from the utterances of Buddha himself. And indeed they are all variations on the same basic theme contained in the four noble truths, Buddha's first sermon. Furthermore the origin of the different and often controversial aspects of the doctrine is to be found in the very approach Shakyamuni Buddha used in his teachings, the only aim of which was to show human beings the way to emancipation from suffering, that is, liberation. Since suffering is a basic fact of life, the goal is common to all but the roads to its elimination are many. To quote the view on this issue of a contemporary Tibetan lama:

A major characteristic of all Buddha's teachings is that they are designed to fit the needs and aptitudes of each individual. Since we all have different interests, problems, and ways of life, no one method of instruction could ever be suitable for everyone. Buddha himself explained that for the purpose of reaching a particular disciple coming from a particular background, he would teach a particular doctrine. Thus there could be certain times when it might be necessary to say "yes" and others when it would be more appropriate to say "no," even in response to the same question.³

This precisely is the strength of Buddhism, namely the flexibility of its methods and practice, its emphasis on each individual's experience, not intellectual, philosophical knowledge alone, or blind faith. Nothing, no method is excluded that could lead to the ultimate goal of liberation. This endows the teachings with an exquisite ability to adapt to the conditions of various people, living in different geographical climates, different cultures, and from different historical backgrounds. In this sense Buddhism has truly a universal character, and a relevance to life, that has persisted undiminished to this day, for its wisdom is rooted in the depth of the human psyche.

With such a wide latitude in matters of instruction and practice, it was inevitable that during the ensuing centuries after Buddha's death doctrinal differences would emerge and a variety of traditions would develop. Two major systems arose: what is sometimes called the *Hinayana*, literally, the "Lesser Vehicle," and the *Mahayana*, the "Greater Vehicle." The former developed into the Buddhism now practiced in Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, while the latter spread to what is now northern India, Mongolia, Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Korea, and Japan.

The Hinayana stresses strict moral regulations and adherence to austere vows of conduct. The ultimate goal is attainment of one's own salvation. The highest stage of individual development, the ideal human being, is called an "arhat." The word means "a slayer of the foe," and the foe is understood to be the passions.⁴

The Mahayana continues where Hinayana leaves off: the ultimate goal of Mahayanists is to seek salvation not for their own sake but for the benefit of all beings. And this goal is no less than the attainment of buddhahood. While Hinayana emphasizes austerity, self-restraint, and high ethical behavior, Mahayana emphasizes intuitive wisdom to remove the veil of ignorance obscuring our pure essence, the buddha nature dwelling in all of us and which only needs to be uncovered. To find one's true self, realize oneself, is to realize the inherent buddha nature. It has been said that "[Hinayana] emphasizes the humanity of the Buddha; Mahayana emphasizes the buddha nature of humanity."⁵

The ideal of the arhat in Hinayana is replaced in the Mahayana system by the ideal of the bodhisattva. From the ideal of a purely private salvation of arhats intent upon realizing nirvana, bodhisattvas have vowed to devote all their pursuits to the welfare of others and to work for a universal deliverance of all beings. In them any self-seeking, egoistic actions and endeavors are totally absent.

Gentle and not abusive,
Without deceit and fraud,
Full of love towards all beings—
So is a Bodhisattva.⁶

The word *bodhisattva* has been defined as meaning "heroic being," "spiritual warrior," or "illumined heart and valiant one."⁷ Bodhisattvas, "gentle and not abusive," react spontaneously to their impulse of compassion toward everyone and all, and are fully involved in the affairs of the world; they are in the midst of it, with all its struggles and tribulations. Theirs is not a negative way of denying and abandoning the world, but a positive way of affirming it and transforming it, by virtue of their great compassion and great wisdom. Their life task is to set people free from ignorance, passion, and evil.

Bodhisattvas have made the indestructible resolution to become a buddha solely for the benefit of others; they have thus single-mindedly entered and are pursuing the way of the enlightened being to become fully integrated, free from confusion and inner conflict. They have developed the means to tap the inner treasure of others, the latent seeds of enlightenment, which according to Mahayana is the common heritage of

humanity. They are “...like the skillful alchemist who by virtue of the power of his chemicals can change silver into gold and gold into silver.”⁸

One naturally wonders and asks:

What is it that gives the bodhisattva this strength by which he excels all the rest? It is his capacity to sustain the comprehension of the true nature of things, his capacity to bear with every circumstance devoid of fear and anxiety, and his ability to meet every situation with unimpeded insight and unbounded compassion.⁹

I have frequently asked myself that same question while in the presence of Tibetan lamas, some of whom, I have not the slightest doubt, have attained the stage of a bodhisattva. And I have also wondered over the exquisite ability with which they are capable of affecting the minds and lives of many Westerners whose historical and cultural background and lifestyles are so vastly different from those of people born and raised in Tibet. Perhaps part of the answer lies in the following description of the bodhisattva:

From the very outset he seeks to realize the wisdom that constitutes Buddhahood, viz., the knowledge of all forms, the knowledge of all the ways of all beings. This is what gives the Buddhas and the advanced bodhisattvas the ability to keep themselves *en rapport* with every situation and render help to each individual in the way suited to him.¹⁰

TIBETAN BUDDHISM

Tibetan Buddhism is part of the Mahayana. When it was introduced into Tibet from India in the seventh century a.d., it met with the native Bon religion and its shamanic practices. As Buddhism spread, many Indian scholars came to Tibet and translated religious texts and their commentaries until Tibetans themselves began writing their own commentaries. It has been said that on the Tibetan soil, Buddhism mixed with the local Bon cult and incorporated some of its features. The present Dalai Lama, however, denies any extraneous influences and states that “the Buddhist teaching that spread to Tibet is just the stainless teaching of India and nothing else. The Tibetan lamas neither altered it nor mixed it with another religion.”¹¹

In the course of time four major schools arose: the *Nyingma*, *Kargyu*, *Sakya*, and *Gelug*. Each of these schools traces its line-age to different Indian scholars and consequently presents variations in the mode of instructions, but Tibetans emphasize that there are no fundamental differences in their philosophy and spiritual practices. All are in quest of the same goal: enlightenment. In fact all adhere to the teachings of both Hinayana and Mahayana, and also Tantrayana (a division of Mahayana). *Yana* is the Sanskrit word for vehicle. A contemporary lama, in one of his lectures, equated this vehicle to a path or an elevator to lift up our consciousness to enlightenment.

There are three principal aspects of that path to enlightenment, the spiritual journey: renunciation, the enlightened motive, and the correct view of reality. “Blended together they are like the fuel propelling our rocket to the moon of enlightenment.”¹² I shall now try to outline them very briefly.

Before entering the path, individuals in all their actions are motivated only by egocentric desires to acquire wealth, power, reputation, i.e., to have pleasure and escape from pain. But little do they know that the scramble for wealth, power, and any worldly aim can never bring satisfaction. This pursuit is what Buddhists call the condition of *samsara*—a Sanskrit term that means “circling.” In this life it refers to our ingrained strong habit of going around and around in circles, chasing after gratification of desires, pleasures of one sort or another, which are invariably eluding us. This is the *perpetuum mobile* of mundane life: moving from one situation to another, fluctuating from one mood to another, desiring an object, acquiring and tasting it, becoming saturated, frustrated, discarding it, and turning around to start the very same process again and again. We never reach the sought-after goal, for the very characteristic of *samsara* is dissatisfaction—suffering. The term *samsara* applies also to the cyclic existence of continuous rebirths, out of which there is no escape, until liberation, that is, nirvana. In that sense *samsara* means “the round of existence.”

According to Buddhist thought the source of *samsara* is ignorance, that is, unawareness, going about in response to the promptings of hedonistic impulses, an unconscious, undisciplined, uncontrolled, scattered mind.¹³

Another kind of ignorance is our delusion that phenomena are permanent, whereas impermanence, change, is the ubiquitous law of nature. We are attached to people, objects, possessions, situations, and above all to our own body and life, and when they