

Excerpted from A PROFOUND MIND

BUDDHISTS BELIEVE THAT WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE QUALITY OF OUR LIVES, OUR HAPPINESS, AND OUR RESOURCES. IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE A MEANINGFUL LIFE WE MUST TRANSFORM OUR OWN EMOTIONS, AS THIS IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO BRING ABOUT FUTURE HAPPINESS FOR OURSELVES AND FOR ALL OTHERS.

NO ONE CAN FORCE US TO TRANSFORM OUR MINDS, NOT EVEN THE BUDDHA. WE MUST DO SO VOLUNTARILY. THEREFORE BUDDHA STATED, “YOU ARE YOUR OWN MASTER.”

OUR EFFORTS MUST BE REALISTIC. WE MUST ESTABLISH FOR OURSELVES THAT THE METHODS WE ARE FOLLOWING WILL BRING ABOUT OUR DESIRED RESULTS. WE CAN’T MERELY RELY ON FAITH. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE SCRUTINIZE THE PATH WE INTEND TO FOLLOW TO ESTABLISH CLEARLY WHAT IS AND WHAT IS NOT EFFECTIVE, SO THAT THE METHODS OF OUR EFFORTS MAY SUCCEED. THIS, I BELIEVE, IS ESSENTIAL IF WE WISH TO FIND ANY TRUE HAPPINESS IN LIFE.

I HESITATE TO TELL YOU ABOUT A SPIRITUAL TRADITION THAT IS NOT YOUR OWN. THERE EXIST MANY FINE RELIGIONS THAT HAVE, OVER CENTURIES, HELPED THEIR FOLLOWERS ATTAIN PEACE OF MIND AND HAPPINESS. THERE MAY, HOWEVER, BE ASPECTS OF BUDDHISM THAT YOU COULD BRING TO YOUR SPIRITUAL PRACTICE.

ALSO, SOME OF YOU HAVE PUT YOUR RELIGION ASIDE AND ARE LOOKING ELSEWHERE FOR ANSWERS TO YOUR DEEPER INQUIRIES. YOU MAY HAVE AN INCLINATION TOWARD EASTERN PHILOSOPHIES WITH THEIR BELIEF IN KARMA AND PAST LIVES. A FEW YOUNG TIBETANS HAVE SIMILARLY DISCARDED THEIR BUDDHIST ORIGINS, FINDING SPIRITUAL SOLACE IN CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM.

UNFORTUNATELY MANY OF US FROM THE VARIOUS TRADITIONS OF BUDDHISM, INCLUDING CHINESE, JAPANESE, THAI, AND SRI LANKAN, SIMPLY CALL OURSELVES BUDDHISTS WITHOUT REALLY KNOWING THE MEANING OF BUDDHA’S WORD. NAGARJUNA, ONE OF BUDDHISM’S GREATEST SCHOLARS AND PRACTITIONERS, WROTE MANY EXPLANATORY WORKS ON BUDDHIST THOUGHT AND PRACTICE THAT REFLECT THE NEED TO KNOW BUDDHA’S TEACHING WELL. IN ORDER TO DEVELOP OUR UNDERSTANDING WE MUST STUDY THOSE TEACHINGS. IF DEEP UNDERSTANDING WERE NOT SO

CRUCIAL TO OUR PRACTICE OF BUDDHISM, I DOUBT THAT THE GREAT SCHOLARS OF THE PAST WOULD HAVE BOTHERED TO WRITE THEIR IMPORTANT TREATISES.

MANY MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT BUDDHISM HAVE ARISEN, PARTICULARLY AROUND TIBETAN BUDDHISM, WHICH IS OFTEN DEPICTED AS MYSTERIOUS AND ESOTERIC, INVOLVING THE WORSHIP OF WRATHFUL, BLOODTHIRSTY DEITIES. I THINK THAT WE TIBETANS, WITH OUR FONDNESS FOR ORNATE CEREMONIES AND ELABORATE COSTUMES, ARE PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS. THOUGH MUCH OF THE RITUAL OF OUR PRACTICE HAS COME TO US FROM BUDDHA HIMSELF, WE ARE SURELY GUILTY OF SOME EMBELLISHMENT. MAYBE THE COLD CLIMATE OF TIBET BECAME A JUSTIFICATION FOR OUR SARTORIAL EXCESSES. TIBETAN LAMAS— OUR TEACHERS— ARE ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR MISCONCEPTIONS. EACH LITTLE VILLAGE HAD ITS OWN MONASTERY WITH A RESIDENT LAMA WHO PRESIDED OVER LOCAL SOCIETY. THIS TRADITION HAS MISTAKENLY BECOME IDENTIFIED AS LAMAISM, SUGGESTING THAT OURS IS A SEPARATE RELIGION FROM BUDDHISM.

IN THIS TIME OF GLOBALIZATION IT SEEMS TO ME PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT THAT WE FAMILIARIZE OURSELVES WITH THE BELIEFS OF OTHERS. THE GREAT CITIES OF THE WEST, WITH THEIR MULTICULTURAL FLAVOR, HAVE BECOME VERITABLE MICROCOSMS OF OUR PLANET. ALL THE WORLD RELIGIONS LIVE SIDE BY SIDE HERE. FOR THERE TO BE HARMONY BETWEEN THESE COMMUNITIES IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE KNOW ABOUT EACH OTHER'S BELIEFS.

WHY IS IT THAT THERE ARE SUCH DIVERSE PHILOSOPHIES WITH SO MANY VARIED SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS BASED UPON THEM? FROM THE BUDDHIST POINT OF VIEW WE RECOGNIZE THE GREAT DIVERSITY IN THE MENTAL INCLINATIONS AND DISPOSITIONS OF HUMAN BEINGS. NOT ONLY ARE WE HUMANS ALL SO VERY DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER, BUT OUR TENDENCIES— WHICH BUDDHISTS CONSIDER TO BE INHERITED FROM PAST LIVES— VARY GREATLY AS WELL. GIVEN THE DIVERSITY THIS IMPLIES, IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE THAT WE FIND SUCH A VAST SPECTRUM OF PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS AND SPIRITUAL TRADITIONS. THESE ARE AN IMPORTANT HERITAGE OF MANKIND, SERVING HUMAN NEEDS. WE MUST APPRECIATE THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHICAL AND SPIRITUAL DIVERSITY.

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