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Healing is a sacred topic and to engage in healing is to be of service for all beings who suffer physically, emotionally and intellectually. Many people living in the first world enjoy some of the best facilities that human life has ever seen, with advantages that their forefathers could only dream of. Despite these freedoms and advantages, they seem so inept to deal with their own negative and destructive emotions. As their working and social requirements rob them of their precious time, they find fewer friends who possess clarity and wisdom to help guide them through difficult times. Those who they can talk to offer less than useful advice, often only agreeing that negative emotions are justified. Without any wholesome guidance, these people often resort to resentment, violence and even substance abuse. Consequently, there are so many people, young and old, who commit suicide or overdose on drugs because they are unable to manage their negative emotions.

As such, there is a dire need to educate ourselves and teach others about how to heal our own emotional instabilities and destructive conduct so we can stop the cycle of pain and suffering they cause. Although the need for such education is clearly evident, there is a distinct lack of attention and education focused on healing our own and other's problems. The literacy rate has never been higher but the books, glamorous magazines, and reading materials that are produced are mostly focussed on negative subjects, gossip and scandals. The paucity of the literature on healing shows how the literary skills of the writers, authors and journalists are wasted in writing quick selling 'crime novels', controversial celebrity stories or fabricated news reports disguising divisive ideological agendas. Further, most people believe what they read so these authors and their stories have an extremely negative effect on individuals and their community. To combat the spread of such literature, writing about healing will add much to the cultivation of happiness and its causes.

If intellectual and emotional pains are not healed properly with

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compassion and wisdom, they will develop into major physical illnesses, cause deep emotional scars and cognitive disabilities. Those who have not learned to heal through using their own emotional confidence become unwell, which is no surprise as they host resentment, ill-will and sadness as the guests in their own emotional home! It has become easier to take a pill to cure various illnesses of the body, but holding onto seething ill-will in the heart over trivial matters or using the tongue to speak with spiteful intent only leads to us experiencing hurt and illness in these areas. In this way, these destructive tendencies ruin one's own health and our relationships with others.

Not only are people suffering from holding negativities in the mind, but they also mistakenly believe that faults are totally in another person's actions. Although hurt and suffering are an inevitable part of life, sufferings are never caused independently by one external thing. The tendency to see everything as 'out there' and blame external things or people as the cause of one's suffering is completely wrong view. Such a mistaken understanding drives many to experience dissatisfaction, despair, anxiety and depression. This tyranny of searching for happiness from external things and also blaming and punishing 'outer enemies' has been the ways of ancient kings and ruthless rulers, none of whom found happiness by thinking this way. Rather than a path to satisfaction, all the harsh words, physical violence, mental afflictions, negative influences, overreactions, selfishness and cognitive obscurations are all interconnected causes of our own and other's suffering.

We seem to live in a society that encourages blame and advocates for a 'zero tolerance' approach to wrongdoing. As such, one's mind becomes set in attempting to prove that one's misery is entirely created by others. When the 'subjective knower' or 'me' is predisposed to finding an external thing as the cause of 'my' suffering, we become consumed in fighting to prove our own half-true story. Many people then choose to pay for professional counselling to identify the true 'enemy' to blame, which seldom solves anything and many times only makes the situation worse. Further, others who are completely unrelated to an issue or event choose to become instant campaigners to 'rescue' the presumed

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victim and persecute wrongdoers, even though there is no evidence their actions will resolve any of the presumed problems. With prolonged anger, hatred and guilt, people may resort to litigation to bring harm and punitive measures upon people who were once their friends and loved ones. It is not difficult to see the pain that blaming others causes ourselves and our community.

Until taught otherwise, people will continue to incorrectly see their suffering as caused by the wrongdoing of others, resulting in violence and overreactions. Continually clouded by delusion by seeking comfort in victory, some may even rejoice in harming others in retribution. As they do not know how to heal, they double their misery without pause. This is like a person who attacks a stone hurled at them, only causing more pain to themselves even after the initial strike has ceased.

Somewhat more mature are those people who see their suffering as their own responsibility but believe that they are 'scarred' or 'broken' due to their genetics, upbringing or peer influences. The effect of this mindset is devastatingly harmful as it causes depression and quickly leads to unconsciously engaging in a prolonged passive aggression towards others. This is analogous to a person who throws another stone back at the person who hurled a stone at them. No healing can take place when they cannot forgive themselves or the other people in their life.

Skilful people see the demerits of these two approaches. They see the benefits of healing their relationships and seek knowledge and wisdom about human emotions to learn how to disassociate a perceived 'problem' from people or their conduct. They learn to separate the mistakes and negative emotions from the basic goodness of humans and seek to heal and grow alongside them. This clarity leads to making peace with oneself and results in a strong practice of forgiveness towards others. This is like a wise person who deals with their own anger rather than concerning themselves with simple stones! Thinking this way empowers us to create attitudinal and emotional shifts – removing the uptight, dense and tense feelings of the past and dawning a new light to reimagine our more calm, forgiving and happy future.

Understanding this, we must believe that anger or pain do not

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have to spoil our mental clarity. We must begin by reforming our heart and mind to have good will for all beings. Embracing the saying 'to live is to give', we can give up a bad fight by embracing a good heart and choosing to practise forgiveness. With an armoured altruism, one can live a meaningful and perfect life by learning to let go, accept defeat, compliment more and complain less, if at all. To 'give peace a chance' by deciding to live alongside people, who are only a secondary cause of our pain and suffering, is how we discover the virtues of compassion and forgiveness. Whether through education, counselling, deep listening, spiritual or inner work, being able to influence our own and other's mindset of 'I am a victim' because of alleged wrongdoing to 'I will employ Right Effort to grow from difficulties' is a major breakthrough. Once we begin thinking this way, we are practising the correct way to see and feel about people and issues; we are allowing space to change our mental and physical behaviour to heal every day.

It is gratifying when people tell me how much this book has helped them to learn to heal themselves and how they have become free from the pain when they stopped blaming others. It is my deepest wish that you are able to experience the same healing that others have experienced.

May this edition of this book reach more people and empower them to enjoy the wellness through tenderness, kindness and insight of care giving to one another.

Freedom from past is attentive living in the present.

May we all practice safe thoughts!

Lama Choedak Rinpoche

21 September 2017, Canberra

Celebrating the 73rd birthday of HH Sakya Gongma Trichen Rinpoche

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INTRODUCTION

Buddha Shakyamuni was born as Prince Siddhartha Gautama, in Lumbini, India (now part of southern Nepal) around 2,600 years ago. At the age of twenty-nine, the Buddha decided to leave his comfortable princely life; in doing so, he left behind his family. In his heart, the Buddha knew that despite the short-term happiness that relationships can bring, they offer no protection from the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. The Buddha wished to find the truth that leads to the elimination of suffering. He firmly believed that living a life as a homeless mendicant to search for this truth would benefit all sentient beings.

After leaving the royal palace, the Buddha studied and practised under a number of Indian spiritual masters, from whom he gained some benefit. However, he soon realised that the only path to reach the goal of enlightenment - complete freedom from the cycle of human suffering - was through self-realisation. With great determination, he sat in meditation for six years, undergoing the privations of hunger and thirst and exposure to extremes of weather, in order to realise the true nature of his own mind. The revelations that led to his enlightenment were that:

- our world and everything in it, including human beings, is by nature impermanent;
- all impermanent things, being subject to change, have the nature of suffering and as such are dissatisfactory;
- our ignorance of the true nature of things causes us to grasp at impermanent things as permanent and unchanging; pain as pleasure; no-self as self; and illusion as reality;
- the sufferings that we endure have causes that can be eliminated through our own efforts.

Accordingly, the first teaching he gave to his disciples after he attained enlightenment is referred to as the Four Noble Truths in which the Buddha taught that:

- our existence - our life and experiences - has the nature of suffering;
- this suffering has causes: our own defiled emotions and ignorance of the true nature of things;
- there is a state of freedom from suffering: enlightenment;
- there is a path that leads to this state: the elimination of our defiled emotions and ignorance of the true nature of things.

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The Buddha taught that the four fundamental principles of the Four Noble Truths were universal to all human problems.

The First Noble Truth is called the truth of suffering. When people face suffering in their lives, the first thing they commonly do is deny it, reject it and, worst of all, try to avoid it. The Buddha said that this was the obvious reason that we suffer in life, because we fail to see the truth of suffering, its meaning and purpose.

Although we do not wish to suffer, we are continually exposed to suffering: this is not because of suffering itself, but because we fail to apply the correct antidotes to suffering. The Buddha explained that people fail to apply the antidotes to their suffering because they do not know the causes of their suffering. We usually believe the causes of our difficulties are someone or something outside us, but suffering is a mental phenomenon and it can only be changed or eliminated by correct perception and the transformation of our mental attitude.

For instance, if we have a special friend who we love but our friend becomes very fond of someone else who we dislike, we may become upset. We will then believe that this upset is due to our friend's behaviour, because they have shown a fondness for someone we do not like. But if we examine it carefully, the cause of our upset is largely due to our own dislike, resentment and hatred towards the person we have chosen to dislike, rather than our friend's relationship with them. If friendship is to be admired and desired, then we must be able to rejoice in another's friendship. We have become upset because of feelings of insecurity and jealousy, provoked by our own anger, which we had not dealt with effectively in the past.

Perhaps we can better understand this if we look at it from the point of view of solving an immediate problem. For instance, if someone is shot in the eye by an arrow, what should they do? They may fail to immediately remove the arrow stuck in their eye; instead they may waste time trying to apprehend and convict the person who shot the arrow. They are more interested to find out what happened before the arrow struck their eye than in trying to remove the arrow, the cause of their discomfort. If someone has an arrow in their eye, then obviously we must remove the arrow first, but so often we do not. Instead, we try to find the cause of the problem. This way of dealing with suffering is extremely hard to overcome. We deny and disapprove of the hurt that we have already experienced, but attempt to bring similar if not heavier harm upon someone else, whether they are proven guilty or not.

For example, blaming the past and the way we were treated in our childhood by our parents does not address our current difficulties either: it simply makes us more resentful about the past. We can begin by understanding that events of the past are not happening now, except that we, ourselves, choose to play them back in our mind. This way we can begin to see how our mental problems are created from trivial causes. To reduce or eliminate the sufferings caused by the poisons in our mind, we must not regard these poisonous emotions as bad or eternally evil.

The many people who do not know anything about the 'three poisons' - greed, hatred and ignorance - become victims of them. However, there are also many other people who do know the danger of the 'three poisons', but suppress them without being able to detoxify them. To remedy this, it is crucial to become familiar with and understand the Second Noble Truth. When we become aware that all human beings are victims of poisonous emotions in their mind, we do not become angry with others; instead, we feel empathy for them. Our empathy brings us to the same level as others, making us more connected. By doing this we will not dwell on our own misery, which will deepen and enlarge it, but instead we will sharpen our focus on the needs of

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others.

The moment we express our feelings and care for others, we discover that they may have been in a similar if not worse mental state than we have been. This is an instant cure for the hurt that we have experienced due to our misunderstanding of other's behaviour. In turn, this transforms our anger into compassion and we feel empowered by this. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that anger does not help us solve a problem at hand; instead, it robs us of our sleep and our appetite and makes us unable to appreciate the good things we have in life.

Through exploring the nature of his own mind, the Buddha had revealed the true source of our suffering: our incorrect perceptions of ourselves and our environment. He had come to realise that it is our own misguided thoughts, feelings and actions that lead us to endure suffering in its various forms - mental and physical pain, restlessness and dissatisfaction - not the actions of others. His wisdom was the realisation that due to the universal law of cause and effect - actions and their results, or karma - we create the very causes of our own unhappiness through actions driven by our 'defiled emotions'.

Traditionally, Buddhism defines the key defiled emotions as the 'three poisons'. These are greed (attachment to things that appear pleasant), hatred (aversion to things that appear unpleasant) and ignorance (of the true nature of things - their impermanence, dissatisfactory nature and so on). The other defiled emotions commonly identified are pride (or arrogance) and envy (or jealousy), which are a result of the 'three poisonous minds'. Our negative actions, driven by these negative emotions, are what lead us to experience suffering in its various forms.

However, the Buddha also taught that we all have the propensity to be kind, compassionate and wise - a basic goodness he called 'buddha nature'. The name 'buddha' in Sanskrit means 'awakened one', so our 'buddha nature' can be likened to a seed of awakening to the true reality of our existence, simply waiting to germinate when we meet the right conditions. The Buddha taught that our buddha nature is obscured by our defiled emotions, which are merely adventitious; that is, they arise and cease without enduring, or affecting the basic purity of our minds.

In the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, a number of examples are given to illustrate the meaning of buddha nature. The first is the analogy of the lotus. This beautiful flower is often used as a symbol of purity and goodness. We often have a strong desire to obtain such qualities and are very focused on the outcome of the growth of ourselves as a beautiful flower. In this way, the lotus symbolises our greed or craving for success. When we are in the process of personal growth, we are disturbed by the difficulties we endure, as if we are a seed underground, impatiently wanting to blossom as a lotus. We do not recognise that this is just the process of growth and has to be undergone to achieve the result we desire. We also do not recognise that the flower, once blossomed, will wither; and so we are disappointed when this occurs.

A lotus seed is originally covered in mud and must make its way out of the mud to become a lotus blossom. The mud that covers the lotus before it blossoms fully does not affect the beauty of the lotus. Likewise, the withering of the flower does not affect the beauty of the lotus that was. In the same way, our greed or craving does not disturb the natural goodness within us.

The lotus has no thoughts of wanting to be the lotus, of being disturbed and impatient at the time it spends growing from a seed, or of disappointment when it withers after having bloomed. Just like the lotus, we too must overcome our craving. In doing so we have to develop a sense of renunciation, letting go of our impatience and expectations, to appreciate what we have. If we can do this, we will be able to appreciate the process we have to go through to change, from the

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difficulties of growth to the inevitability of separation, knowing that we have not lost anything by experiencing this entire process.

The second example of buddha nature is that of bees, which symbolise our anger and agitation. Bees make and accumulate honey for themselves, not for human consumption, so they become agitated and sting us when we take the honey from them. Likewise, when others try to take things from us that we value, we become agitated, angry and 'sting' them with our anger. Just as a bee feels they have a right to sting those who steal honey from them, we also feel righteous anger towards those who have taken the things we have accumulated through our craving. The more craving we have for the things in our life - wealth, possessions, relationships, ideas and concepts - the more inclined we will be to have anger.

Further, when we are trying to achieve something, we are agitated and angered by even the slightest mistake we make. This too is like disturbing a hive of bees and we feel the sting of our own anger. What we cannot see is that the thing that stings (the bee) is the same thing that produces the honey. The honey symbolises our patience: just as the sting of the bee does not affect the honey it produces; our anger does not affect the patience that is part of the natural purity of our minds. To endure the impact of our own mistakes or those of others, we must nurture the honey of our patience.

The third example that illustrates buddha nature is a rice husk. The husk symbolises our ignorance, or lack of awareness; our true nature is considered to be shrouded in the husk of self-sabotage and criticism. As we cannot see our true nature (the rice in the husk), we tend to throw away the rice along with the husk. What we see (the husk) and what really exists (the rice grain within the husk) are two different things. Our lack of awareness of this makes us a victim of our own 'incorrect vision'. When we recognise the husk (our ignorance) and the grain (our basic goodness) as separate, we realise that the husk is there because the rice is in it. This grain within the husk is the basic purity of our mind. Being enshrouded in a husk does not diminish the quality of the rice grain. Likewise, the temporary 'husk' of ignorance that enshrouds our mind does not affect its basic nature.

More than 2,600 years ago the Buddha attained the wisdom that understood impermanence, karma - the law of cause and effect - and the true nature of the world, ourselves and our mind. This wisdom is entirely relevant to our relationships with others in the modern world. Conflict is rife in many corners of our world community: our homes, workplaces and local communities are often hotbeds of disharmony. Through our inability to deal with our brooding anger and resentment and forgive the harm that others have caused us, we are often unable to maintain healthy personal relationships. The Buddha's wisdom can help us to develop strategies to deal with our defiled emotions. By avoiding future harm through kindness and by healing past harms through regret and forgiveness, we can strengthen and enhance all our relationships - past, present and future.

The Buddha recognised that the core practice for any genuine spiritual practitioner is compassion. Compassion is taught in all religions, but in Buddhism compassion without wisdom is likened to a bird with only one wing. While we all believe in compassion and its virtues, we must not impose anything upon others in the name of compassion. If someone does not want our compassion, we must have the wisdom to accept their rejection and at the same time not be discouraged by the experience.

It is important to maintain a sense of balance and moderation in whatever we do in life, whether it is through our religious beliefs, our sense of compassion or otherwise. As we all know,

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if we resort to extremes, religion can bring more suffering than benefit to the world. There are things that we should not be too certain about, so we should have the wisdom to let the law of cause and effect take its own course, and learn to just accept some things. For everything will change in its own time; nothing in the world is permanent.

No matter how hurtful a situation it may have been, it will pass. Do not dwell on the past, whether good or bad, for it may obscure the good things that surround you now. The ability to maintain the mind in a free and accepting state is the art of happiness, joy and love. This is called the truth of the path, the Third Noble Truth. It is also the path known as the Middle Way, which comprises the Eightfold Noble Path.