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The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date April 18, 2000

DE-6 (2/88)
ABSTRACT

This study chronicles a non-modern pedagogical tradition, Indo-Tibetan (Gelugpa) Buddhist education, as it negotiates a modern, global context in exile in India. As an enlightenment tradition, Buddhism emphasizes investigative inquiry over scriptural orthodoxy and belief, making it compatible with some aspects of modern, secular culture. This is a study of the relationship between these two educational cultures within one educational institution—Dolma Ling Nunnery and Institute of Dialectics in the Indian Himalayas. The text itself is arranged in the form of a *mandala*, which is divided into five sections or stages of learning: intention, path, inference, experience, and realization.

The *intention* section highlights the value of cultural and educational diversity, and includes a brief synopsis of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist educational history. The *path* section describes specific Buddhist approaches to ethnography and social research. The *inference* chapter is the empirical (ethnographic) component of the study, and considers the practice of dialectical debate as a case of what Wittgenstein called a “language game.” This chapter includes photographic documentation and the text of a public (Western-style) debate held at Dolma Ling on the subject of the merits of their traditional debate system. The *experience* chapter considers the unique role of direct perception (experience) in Buddhism, and how it can be educated through combined meditational and testimonial practices.

The author explores the tendency to segregate experiential from rational paths, especially when liminal experiences of suffering, bliss, and death are involved. She concludes that such experiences strain our powers of reason and, in some cases, representation, resulting in a tendency to marginalize such experiences within formal, rational education systems and their knowledge bases. Narrative, poetic, and direct experiential methods of meditation are better suited to deal with these subjects. The “realization” chapter discusses conceptions of realization, praxis and embodiment, that is, rational inferences translated into direct experience and action, as of particular relevance to educators. In the Buddhist view, such realizations are the desired end of all inquiry. This end is accomplished through creative and direct “conversations” (testimonies, dialogues) between reason and direct experience on the path of learning.
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I use various designations for Buddhism in this text, and the reader should consider Buddhism identified as designating the scope of the claim made. So, if I say the more generic "Buddhism," then this indicates that the claim is being made for all paths of Buddhism. If "Tibetan" Buddhism is used, then it identifies a phenomenon or practice developed after Buddhism was established in Tibet. "Gelugpa" Tibetan Buddhism refers to a specific practice of the Gelugpa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Overall, I refer to "Indo-Tibetan" rather than just "Tibetan" Buddhism to reinforce the historical continuity of many of the textual and pedagogical contents and practices that developed in India and went to Tibet with the spread of Buddhism. It helps to remind us of the cultural and geographic flexibility of Buddhism, which has been engaged in cross-cultural conversations since its inception. Indeed, perhaps the Buddhism discussed in these pages might be called "Indo-Tibetan-North American" Buddhism, since it no doubt has gone through yet another permutation as I have attempted to understand it within the contexts of the Western academy. For now, I will keep the "Indo-Tibetan" label as we begin to sort out just what North American Buddhism is in the process of its emergence.

I have used English translations of Tibetan and Sanskrit terms in this text. To clarify any ambiguity, where it seemed helpful I have added the Tibetan or Sanskrit terms in parentheses. The Tibetan language is difficult to transcribe into English because of its complex spelling and reliance on silent letters not pronounced in spoken Tibetan. To help with the pronunciation, and to remind readers that it is a living, spoken language, I have capitalized the transcribed letter that is first pronounced. I have not done so with the Sanskrit terms as it is no longer a spoken language.
I would like to thank the many people who have supported me directly and indirectly in undertaking the research and writing of this text. In particular, I am indebted to HH the Dalai Lama for his lucid and accessible teachings, to the late Ven. Tara Tulku for his compassionate care, to Zazep Tulku Rinpoche for his community, to Cecilie Kwiat for her meditational mentoring, and to HH the 16th Karmapa and Namgyal Rinpoche (George Dawson) for opening this path to me. At the University of British Columbia, I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. Carl Leggo and Dr. Bonny (Peirce) Norton of the Department of Language and Literacy Education, whose combined patience and inspiration were a constant source of encouragement. I would also thank the other members of my doctoral committee, Dr. William Bruneau, Dr. Daniela Boccassini, and my comprehensive exam supervisors, Dr. Ted Aoki and Dr. Patricia Duff. Thanks are owed to Dr. Karen Meyer, Director of the Centre for Studies of Curriculum and Instruction, for her co-creating and sustaining such a creative intellectual community.

For their editorial comments and tireless support, I thank my fellow graduate students and dear friends Joanna Carson, Anne Bruce, and Angela Hryniuk. Credit for having the courage to teach me the Tibetan language are due to the Namgyal Institute in Ithaca, NY, and Tashi and Losang Rabgey and their parents of Lindsay, ON. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the considerable contribution and ideas of Drs. Humberto Maturana and Brian Goodwin, with whom I studied at Schumacher College, UK, in March of 1999. Prof. Dr. Tu Weiming of the Harvard-Yenchin Institute inspired many of my reflections on the need to bring more dialogue between traditional and modern cultures. I met Dr. Tu at the Mind and Life dialogues in Dharamsala and again, with his wife Rosanne Hall, in Cortona Italy and in Boston in the autumn of 1999.

In India, my research would have been impossible without the kind support of all the nuns of Dolma Ling, and in particular of the senior administrator of the Tibetan Nuns’ Project, the Ven. Losang Dechen. I would also like to thank Kalon Rinchen Khandro Choegyal and Dr. Elizabeth Napper of the Tibetan Nuns’ Project for welcoming me to stay and to study at Dolma Ling for the duration of my research. Above all, I would like to thank the then Principal of Dolma Ling, Gen. Pema Tsawang Shastri, whose critical mind, astute translations, scholarly advice, teaching, and care made my stay there both comfortable and worthwhile. Finally, I would like to thank the monks of Seramey, and in particular the acting abbot, Geshe Rabga, for their kindness and hospitality during my month there.

I am grateful for the generous financial assistance of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Killam Trust, the Webster Foundation, Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute (Language and Women & Development fellowships), the University of British Columbia, Canadian Airlines, and Schumacher College, UK. I would also like to thank Dr. George Tilser for his “dental” scholarship, and the late Marion Macpherson, my aunt whose support was pivotal in easing financial strains during the final year of this process. Finally, I would like to thank my mother, Beverley MacPherson, for so many reasons, not the least of which for being my confidante, bank manager, secretary, and friend through these, and many more, years!
PRELIMINARIES: ...embarking on a journey
Preliminaries\textsuperscript{1} for embarking on a journey:

The intellectual landscape of our times cries out for perspective—-for overview and distance, and a type of integrated cosmological awareness the academe sacrificed when it abandoned God. To convey this sense of universal responsibility, I begin with the universe, wherein we find a galaxy with a particular solar system on its orbital edge. Inside this solar system is a blue planet in the prime of its youth, a planet constituted of many sentient beings who act to sustain its oxygen-rich system, wherein one above all predominates—\textit{homo sapiens} or human beings. Now these human beings have proliferated to such an extent that they are eradicating most other species of the planet’s system, while continuing to starve and kill one another. In their place, humans have re-organized matter to create sophisticated geometric structures and technologies.

Throughout all this, the planet and its life forms continue to change—-evolve perhaps, devolve perhaps\textsuperscript{2}. Until most recently, the pattern of this change has tended towards greater complexity and diversification, both in physical and cognitive qualities. This has reversed in recent times, with a dramatic loss of diversity in species forms, and a concurrent loss of forms of consciousness (experiences, cultures). At the same time, more subtle qualities of awareness appear to be eroding as human beings increasingly attend to material development, technologies and abstracted experiences of corporate bureaucracies and mass media. They are preoccupied with the signs rather than the substance of wellbeing, disassociated as they have become from a connection with the depth, qualities, and potential of embodied experience. Embodied experience is phenomenal rather than “physiological” \textit{per se}; it nonetheless involves a complex interaction between multiple direct sensory and perceptual experiences and the
physiological responses to those experiences. It is an interconnected web of relations situated in the body rather than in a disembodied, abstract conceptual or imaginary domain.

It is just such embodied experience that can be said to evolve—matter just changes alongside it. In this respect, I would contend that it is experience that drives evolution, as sentient beings reach to enhance the quality of their experience towards greater happiness and wellbeing. In this I follow the thinking of the Chilean biologist Humberto Maturana (1987, 1990, 1997, 1998) who considers evolution from the perspective of the continuous shifting and habits of a manner of living. From this perspective, human evolution and wellbeing is enhanced by awareness (i.e. reflection and reflexivity combined), wherein such habits and shifts are recognized and in certain cases altered. Education is an important human adaptation used to further cultivate these habits, shifts and, to varying degrees, qualities of awareness required for more intentional shifts in our manner of living. This function is not always explicit; it can arise implicitly in an unstated, and sometimes unconscious, hidden curriculum.

Now, I am a human being and not an omniscient God. So, my perspective is necessarily arrived at inside consciousness, and to be more specific, inside a human consciousness conditioned as it is by human sense organs, patterns of perception, and language (that is, cultured contexts). It is easy to overlook the question of consciousness as it is so familiar as to be invisible in ordinary experience. After all, experience is the hallmark of consciousness, and it is impossible to step outside of experience per se. So, the awareness of experience or consciousness is something rather subtle—difficult to cultivate and easily lost. To reflect on experience itself requires a combination of met
awareness and reflect/reflexivity that comes with a well-cultivated quality of attention and investigative inquiry (that is, question). *Education*, literally “to draw out,” or more formally as the systematic attempt to teach and learn the knowledge of a culture, and *socialization* as the informal equivalent of education, combine to condition experience. Together, they condition both the content and quality of experience, but they do not necessarily cultivate such an awareness of experience itself.

What constitutes a *human* consciousness in particular? Our physiological hardware is an insufficient though necessary condition for the experience of being human. Instead, our completion as a human being is something that arises in a social, languaged environment. Indeed, so dependent have we become on such a social world that a human child will die if left in the wilderness on its own.\(^3\) It is only with language and the conceptual development that accompanies language that such survival—even in a wilderness bereft of people—becomes secured. So, a human consciousness or human experience combines a particular pattern of sensory perception with a conceptual overlay of language and culture. In turn, this abstract realm creates conditions whereby the reflectivity, reflexivity and meta-awareness required to recognize experience or consciousness as such becomes possible. Through this path from social interaction to language, culture and meta-awareness, we learn to distance from, and gaze back upon, consciousness, all the while necessarily remaining *inside* it. Accordingly, human meta-awareness is a developmental phenomenon that arises from human community, patterns of emotion, language, and interactions to meta-conception and meta-awareness. The study of experience and its relation to conceptual thought and reason is a necessary
component of this development, and for this reason such studies are of personal, social and even evolutionary interest to the wellbeing of human beings and our societies.

As is love, for the social milieu in which language emerges is constituted by highly reinforcing feelings that encourage high degrees of interaction and physical and emotional intimacy and affection. Other sentient beings—at least some birds and mammals—may have the experience of love, and indeed there may be an aspect of what we call "love" that is the "stuff" of sentience itself. Yet, certain patterns and expressions of such affection can be said to be uniquely human and even biologically human (Maturana 1997b, Bunnell & Forsythe 1999). Particularly unusual is what might be called "altruism," that is the ability to cultivate feelings of intimacy and concern for those not in one's immediate family or group. Such an altruistic attitude is made possible in part by language and conceptual thought, though just like meta-awareness, it is not necessarily present in every human being but probably requires some form of learning and education. One important expression of that altruistic awareness is the ability to see the necessary connections between our own pursuit of wellbeing and a sense of responsibility for universal wellbeing.

The patterns of cultural organization and education referred to as "modern" have proved highly effective in curbing population. Access to such education, especially for women, is one of the clearest predictors of a reduction in birth rates, more than access to technologies of birth control per se. In rural India, for example, when such technologies became accessible on a nation-wide basis, it made little appreciable dent on population growth levels. Education has helped to sustain the voluntary reduction of reproduction much more effectively. There is something about the shift to literacy and abstract
thinking that encourages or enables women to establish a quality of life less predicated on reproduction. Unfortunately, formally organized education systems encourage women and men to replace the desire for babies with the desire for consumer goods. Although there may only be one person where there were once ten, the one consumes considerably more resources than in past times. The net effect of such “education” is to reduce collective wellbeing even if enhancing personal wellbeing. And that is an “if” writ large, for the question remains whether quality of life is in fact enhanced by modern consumption patterns or whether what is in fact being consumed are signs of quality without ever realizing the promise they represent.

In modern society and its formal education systems, at least tacit concern for individual quality of life is given precedence over collective interests. The path to quality of life is commonly defined to mean a nuclear family wherein one reproduces one’s own community, an occupation wherein one produces lots of currency for exchange, and the consumption of large amounts of processed materials and resources. Thus, our cultural formula for enhanced quality of life is at odds with the formula for enhanced collective wellbeing—for example, reducing population and consumption. Under an attitude of universal responsibility, the massive export of modern education poses a problem since it recommends such a pattern of experience and desire to a wide audience. Meanwhile, this “modern” formal education replaces local and indigenous educational arrangements—formal and informal—as children lose direct connection with traditional communities. One traditional education system is historically linked to population stability, modest consumption, and an explicit commitment to enhance happiness and wellbeing. The system I refer to is Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, and the monastic form of that education in
of course, the decline in population is accounted for most directly by the fact that the nuns and monks are celibate, but what may be overlooked is that many join such communities out of a desire to be free of the burden of reproduction and production in the first place. Having lived in these communities—both communities of nuns and monks—I can attest that they enjoy a remarkably high degree of energy, relatively low signs of depression, and a seemingly high quality of life (that is, wellbeing, happiness). So, in most cases the low birth and consumption rates do not appear to be secured through repression or oppression—that is, at the expense of their happiness or realization as human beings. Indeed, if one contrasts their quality of life to the harried existence of many seemingly successful, modern people, subject as we have become to high suicide, homicide, divorce and mental illness rates, one can’t help but wonder if there isn’t something deceptive in the modern “story” of our increased quality of life.

What Indo-Tibetan Buddhist monastic communities do offer is a path to personal wellbeing (that is, quality of life) that appears to be more complementary with our collective path to wellbeing, whereby “collective” refers to all sentient, not just human, life. As a religious community, their lifestyle may seem distant and difficult to emulate with their complex vows and rules of organization; however, I am convinced that modern, secular society has something to learn from their example. In particular, I am interested in their unique approach to learning and knowledge, where patterns of desire and experience are so significantly socialized and instilled. In this respect, the primary intention of this work is to learn about learning in and from Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. I use the preposition in to suggest that I am a participant in the system, which I am; only in this way can I hope to get at the subtle ways in which education conditions experience
and desire. As well, I use the preposition *from* to indicate that I am also an outsider—a modern subject speaking to other modern subjects, imbued in this culture that has become so ubiquitous in our contemporary era, attempting to describe and represent people and systems that are still largely non-modern. The use of *from* reflects my inference that modern cultures and those people imbued in its sensibilities can benefit from engaging in meaningful dialogue with non-modern cultures and peoples, so that the dynamic of cultural change becomes reciprocal rather than unidirectional.

On a more personal note, this is a work that began over 23 years ago with a paper I wrote in my final year of high school on the subject of creativity. It combined a literature review with a conceptual and empirical study, which spanned 80 hand-written pages when completed. My conclusion was that if creativity could be educated, then it required a specialized training like meditation to cultivate. Only in this way could education enact the required change in the way we think and experience the world, beyond a simple shift in curricular contents. Having arrived at such a well-reasoned inference, I spent the following year building the courage to undertake training in meditation myself, which I finally did. Since then, I have let my life, my *experience* be my *experiment* (from the common Latin root *experiri*, meaning *to test, to try*). This document is my attempt to share with you the finding of those experiments with experience.

Accordingly, my experiences are part of my credentials. This accords with the Tibetan Buddhist understanding that one’s direct experiences studying with lamas of various lineages in oral instruction is of greater value than one’s credentials in reading or writing texts. At the beginning of any teaching, lamas will usually articulate the lineage
of lamas from whom they received the particular teachings involved. In my case, during these intervening 23 years, I have studied and practiced with some of the leading Tibetan Buddhist teachers and meditators in the world. These include His Holiness (HH) the Dalai Lama, HH Sakya Trisin, his sister Jetsun Chime Luding, HH the 16th Karmapa, the Ven. Tara Tulku and Ven. Lati Rinpoche. In addition, I have studied with less well-known but nonetheless accomplished figures such as Namgyal Rinpoche, Cecile Kwiat, Zazep Tulku Rinpoche, and the Khyentse Rinpoche of Namgyal Monastery in Ithaca. During this same period, I have visited and lived in multiple countries and cultures in the world, including Greece, Sri Lanka, India, England, Italy, and the USA. Throughout, I can say with all sincerity that I have tried my best to understand, practice, and realize the Buddhist path of learning single-mindedly and to the best of my ability. During the four years it took to complete this document, I completed a series of initiations, teachings, retreats and fire pujas of the Manjusri/Yamantaka Tantric meditations associated with reason, language, debate, and Father Tantra, as well as the Heruka/Vajrayogini initiations, teachings, retreats and fire puja connected with the cultivation of pristine awareness (direct perception) and Mother Tantra. The latter I completed immediately prior to completing the final draft of the section on experience. In both cases, insights gained during these retreats informed the writing of these pages.

I have arranged the text as if it were a mandala, a Sanskrit term meaning mind tool. I do so to reflect my aspiration that, like the Tibetan mandala, this text might become a technology to expand awareness. Today, mandalas tend to be used exclusively for Tantric initiation, but Tsongkhapa (1977) points out that entrance into a mandala and initiation had been conducted separately but became almost synonymous. These days,
with the desire to share their culture with the world, Tibetans like HH the Dalai Lama are encouraging the construction of mandalas outside of the strict context of initiation, for example in museums, to educate other countries and peoples about Tibet and its Tantric arts. Yet, mandalas are used for much more complex purposes than the visual arts we are accustomed to. As Tsongkhapa reflected:

A mandala is said to be extremely profound because meditation on it serves as an antidote, quickly eradicating the obstructions to liberation and the obstructions to omniscience as well as their latent predispositions. It is difficult for those of low intellect to penetrate its significance. (p. 77)

Mandalas come in different forms, but are commonly circular, two-dimensional representations of divine abodes, whose third dimension is generally enacted in consciousness itself (that is, in the imagination). They are often divided into four quadrants, distinguished visually by differing colours, with a fifth area in the centre inhabited by the deity of the mandala. Each quadrant, as well as the central platform, has an entrance or gate. Accordingly, I have organized the text into five distinct chapters distinguished by a particular order of colours—white, yellow, red, green, and blue. I have organized these five chapters into contents and titles that reflect the sequence of learning I have come to appreciate as representative of the Buddhist path of learning:

1. Intention (white)
2. Path (yellow)
3. Inference (red)
4. Direct experience (green)
5. Realization (blue)
While the journey reflects my personal journey of discovery, it also represents the optimal journey of students through the system of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist monastic education as constituted in the Gelugpa system. While the structure might be considered to be generically Buddhist, I have chosen to illustrate its particular manifestation in the Tibetan Gelugpa system. I have tried to clearly distinguish any claims I make about the more generic Buddhist path from the more specific Indo-Tibetan Buddhist path from the even more specific Gelugpa Indo-Tibetan Buddhist path, but if there is any question then the reader should assume that I am referring to the latter.

The gate to each of these chapters is created through a rather abstract, loose association between the particular colour and experiences associated with that colour. I have done this in an attempt to anchor my awareness, and subsequently my reader’s awareness, in perception and form to remind us of their difference from abstract concepts, with which this textual mandala is necessarily constructed. At the same time, I do so to remind the reader that prior to being constituted of words, this text was constituted of systematic thinking and lived experiences, which I have here reconstituted in its pages. Like the Tibetan mandalas, its third dimension is constructed in turn by the experience of your own consciousness, which is ultimately your purview.

...Now I invite you to join me on the journey, which knows no destination apart from the going... To be my companions, readers, I ask only one thing: that you commence this journey with an open heart/mind. Such openness, in turn, requires three qualities: attention, interest, and question. So, if you are agreeable, then take my hand...here it is...and off we go...
Notes:

1 In employing the term “preliminaries,” I am adapting the Tibetan Buddhist term, (ngon dro, or ‘first going’), which refer to reflections on the “four thoughts that turn the mind:” 1) the rare and precious human birth; 2) death and impermanence; 3) karma (cause and effect); and 4) samsara (suffering or struggle). There is no direct correspondence between these four topics and the substance of this preliminary discussion, but there is a sufficient parallel to merit using the same term.

2 Indeed, there is mounting speculation that human beings in affluent societies may have stepped outside of evolutionary pressures to a great extent through the intervention of technologies. There is in this the sense of the evolution of a collective technological body rather than the evolution of individual corporeal bodies. I do not believe we have stepped outside of nature or evolution in this respect, and would contend that such a view is predicated on a narrow interpretation of evolution from natural competitive selection. Modern affluent humans are just adapting and evolving to a more socialized and technical environment, and the changes (that is, adaptation and evolutionary shifts) arise through our manner of living, as discussed in the evolutionary theories of Maturana (1987, 1990, 1997, 1998), rather than exclusively through genetic competition and survival.

3 This is evidenced in the few cases of children found to have been reared by wolves, known as the “wolf children,” who died soon after being reclaimed by human society (see Maturana and Varela, 1987, p. 128-129).

4 I am here referring to the attention and care required for sentient beings to survive. Minimally, this means attention and care on one’s own survival. In mammals, offspring require the attention and care of mothers to survive. These mammalian mothers suspend their own interest and wellbeing for their offspring. Whether or not such actions are intentional or spontaneous, these are the roots of love, which in human beings can be developed into more intentional attempts to recognize the legitimacy of others and the needs of others to find happiness and relief from suffering. Even the most despicable human being would not have survived without some degree of care and attention from others. Even as wounded adults, these people harbour at least a faint flame of love for themselves or some others, even if most of their relations are driven by hatred or greed.

5 I say this because the mere act of conceptualizing a world beyond our direct perception requires the intervention of language and socialization. The ability to conceive of a “universe” and to reverse a certain innate self-centred, according to Buddhism, requires the intervention of concepts and analysis. Indeed, HH the Dalai Lama (1996) claims analysis is the principal way to cultivate altruism, more than single-pointed meditation.

6 This is discussed extensively by Planned Parenthood and other international development organizations. See Bumiller (1990) for a good discussion of the issues and practices of population control in India. She discusses the remarkable success of the state of Kerala, where women are considerably more literate than elsewhere without an appreciable higher expenditure by the state on education (p. 276-277).

7 For discussions, explanations, and photographs of various types of mandalas used in the Tibetan Tantric arts, see Brauen (1997), Bryant (1992), or Rhie & Thurman (1991).

8 The order of colours varies with different deity yoga meditational mandalas. The order given here corresponds with the sequence found in, for example, the Zhi kho mandala depicted in the photographs on page 14 and 15 (from Brauen, 1997). This is also the sequence of colours found in White Tara’s longevity visualization. In the Kalachakra sequence of colours, the fourth quadrant is dark blue not green. The colours correspond to the five Dhyani Buddhas. On a deeper level, just as all colours are wavelengths of light translated into human experience, the colours of mandalas have both a physiological and phenomenological metonymic (rather than metaphorical) significance. They correspond, respectively, with: 1) white as vajra, purification (Mirror-like Wisdom); 2) yellow as ratna (jewel), generosity and increasing (Wisdom of Equanimity); 3) red as padma, passion and bliss (Wisdom of All-accomplishing action); 4) green as karma, activity (Wisdom of All-accomplishing action); 5) blue as Buddha, primordial intelligence and awareness (Wisdom of All Encompassing Space) (Trungpa, 1973/1987). These colours appear in the form of different meditative deities as well, whose colours depend on their particular meditative function. White (for example, White Tara or Chenreisig) is associated with the desire realm, red (for example, Vajrayogini) with the form realm, and dark blue (for example, Kalachakra) with the formless realm. Yellow is highly energetic (for example, Sakyamuni Buddha and some versions of Manjusri) and green (for example, Green
Tara is both active and protective. The principle of the Lower Tantric practices are to visualize all places as divine abodes, all beings as Buddhas, and all resources as amrit nectar. In visualizing the world as pure in this way, one experiences happiness and trust. The mandala meditation involves an outer and inner meditational practice. The outer mandala, as described in the structure of this text, is a way of conceiving of the phenomenal universe. The inner mandala translates this outer mandala into the human body (Brauen, 1997).
Ground plan of a three-dimensional Zhi khro mandala (east at bottom): interior of the palace ...

... which rests on two crossed vajras and is enclosed by a lotus-flower circle ...

... followed by further circles: charnel-grounds, vajras ...

... and, on the outside, flames. The four entrances to the palace are clearly visible ...
... which together with the transparent walls support the palace roof.

Complete Zhi khro mandala viewed from above ...

... and from the south side.
WHITE: ....intention

Chapter one...
White luminous gates:

...A single granule of sugar illuminated by a certain line of light. The light collapses in exploding photons of brilliant white, leaving crystal geometries and a deep-belly laugh becoming infinite, deep, blue-black, out of which a primordial voice speaks of things to pass. I quake with the revelation. My entire body shakes as I open to an expanse of white eyes arching to summits of black penetrating pupils, at whose centres sit pinpoint craters of space--holes to let light enter. Black pupils frame the holes; pigmented irises frame the pupils; white cornea frame the irises; and friends' faces frame the cornea. Outside, snow falls for the first time that winter, sparkling as it catches the light moving from our room into the darkness of night. We go outside to unravel tongues, licking snowflakes from the sky. Some land on my mittens, and we congregate to study the white crystals revealed to our naked eyes.

Defining "white": An achromatic colour of maximum lightness, the complement or antagonist of black, the other extreme of the neutral grey series. Although typically a response to maximum stimulation, white appears always to depend upon contrast.¹

The paradox of white.

"An achromatic colour": a non-colour.

"A response to maximum stimulation": a whole colour.
White is a colour / non-colour emerging from all colours? The paradox of white: White is achromatic while the entire colour spectrum is implicit in it. Rainbows are implicit in white. As white wanes, so too do lightness and colour. The first debates in Tibetan monasteries concern colour, where white is a colour, unequivocally—a primary, root colour. In their Tantric meditations, white arises as rainbow light arises, a white that is simultaneously part and whole—root and spectrum combined.

...White is a colour of creation—primordial white photons of light; primordial white semen; primordial white rainbow light becoming...

...a dictatorship of white. The entire landscape is patrolled by white—chrome and white—from labyrinthine hallways and sterile uniforms to the starched sheets and safety bars I peer between as I am rolled, prostrate, to the operating room. Inside, white lights vanquish the lingering shadows. The last vestige of colour disappears as the white-masked anaesthesiologist removes my over-washed blue-grey gown to uncover my chest and bare arm as he transfers me to a white-sheeted surgical bed. He warns me of an impending prick as he administers a local anaesthetic to eliminate the sensation of the tube he is about to introduce into my arm. As the metallic tip of the syringe slides under my skin, I feel a sting and a surge of bitter flavoured saliva erupting from my tongue:

1. [experience] “I tasted that you know”, I say, looking up at him, smiling.
2. [experience invalidated] “No you didn’t. You couldn’t have.”
4. [experience obliterated] He inserts the tube and blackness prevails.

1 From Houghton-Mifflin Canadian dictionary of the English Language.
(top left) White Tara for longevity
(top right) The fields and mountains next to Dolma Ling
(below) Dolma Ling ("Tara's place")
"We exchange time for experience."
- Mark Strand, poet

In an hourglass, it would have seemed more convincing, moving in an orderly passage of sand, particle by particle. Such a measure might have given Time that irreprousable aura of gravity, and averted the question that was to preoccupy the remainder of my days. But in the stovetop clock, with hands prone to irregular jolts emanating from a common joint long in need of oil, time betrayed its illusory face and so my life shifted direction irrevocably. Even to my seven-year-old sensibility, time equalled pain, that is, the pain of change with its sense of loss, the pain of punctuality and of being late, the pain of facing an uncertain future and an all-too-fixed past. My first conscious memory is running out of it—running out of time, I run to get a dime from my mother to buy a cone from the ice-cream man. My older brother runs faster, past me to my mother’s last coin, so by the time I arrive, her wallet is empty and the ice-cream little more than a fading bell in the distance. Something of life came to ring with that bell and time with its fading...the frenetic pain of desire, of unrealized desire, of promise & of loss.

Three years later, on the last day of kindergarten, I arrive at my street corner as the sun peers between the leaves of the large trees lining the road down to where my house waits beyond view. The moment of turning brings a surge of sunlight and with it an excitement somewhere between my belly and my heart. With it comes a deep contentment, even bliss, and a vivid awareness of my body walking...the rhythm of my feet...walking. ...One foot rising as the other touches the ground, settling, lifting, rising...as the other foot settles again... Why, these feet carry me at the end of
kindergarten as they will one-day carry me through to the end of grade six! ...So that is
time... I know, you see, that there is something about this moment; and if there isn't now,
there will be. Somewhere, something, between the light and my feet, will survive to grade
six. In grade six, I will walk down the street and remember these feet that carry me home
so well on this, the final day of kindergarten. ...All those years ago.

I don't know what it was about transitions between home and school that made it
such fertile ground for childhood experiences. Perhaps it was its gaping quality,
uncertain yet freeing, a gap between a personal and public self where I could wonder and
wander at will even when in conflict with what lay on the other side—that is, the school.
There was something about its very absence that invited presence, sometimes ominously.
Take, for example, grade two: After lunch, I stood in a crowd waiting to return to class.
The bell sounded. We were nearing the school doors when I realized I was chewing gum.
I couldn't reach the wastebasket, and so surreptitiously dropped the gum in the palm of
my hand. That year my teacher was, shall we say, strict. Some gum adhered to my hand,
which I struggled to remove with my remaining hand as I walked past the supervisor.
Yet, the gum only spread further, to the fingers and palm of the other hand, like a leprosy
in fast-forward motion. The stain of sin drove me inexorably towards the nightmare of
my teacher's gaze. With a head hung in shame, I approached.

Her nostrils widened noticeably with a sardonic grin betraying itself in the
corners of her eyes—"Why, you don't belong in grade two; you don't even belong in
grade one." With that, as if to demonstrate my displacement, she led me before the grade
one class for a lesson in humiliation. She was sure, she said, none of them would behave
in such a reprehensible fashion, and wasn't it true I wasn't fit for grade one never mind
grade two! She called my mother to fetch me. By the time my mother arrived, I had lost my breath somewhere between shame and hysteria. At home, my mother’s kind voice comforted me all afternoon, as my tears mixed with the soapy water of the bathroom sink where together we scrubbed the sign of my banishment from my humiliated hands.

In grade three, it was the clock that found me waiting, now more anxiously than before. Lunch was finished but Hercules still leapt across the television screen in the backroom—that meant, what the clock confirmed, that it wasn’t quite 12:30, the time I usually left for school. In fact, the clock barely moved, but sat there as an insipid ennui of waiting seeped into and tore at my seams. The irritation was palpable as I fixed my attention on the minute hand, which steadfastly refused to move. Since my eyes were obsessively preoccupied with the clock anyway, I thought to learn more about time—to locate, attend, and examine time to discover just what it was all about. Fixing on the clock’s hands, I waited to witness directly their incremental progress towards my departure. The long hand didn’t move for some time...then--jerky jolt--a minute and a half forward in one movement. Well, a lot had happened in the period when that long minute hand had stood still, all my impatient irritation and efforts at concentration, the Herculean sounds in the distance, and the breeze from the window arising and subsiding. Those changes, it seemed to me, were time, while the clock hands stood still. Why, the clock’s hands didn’t even follow the rules I learned in school—that 60 seconds brought the long hand forward a full minute in measured motion. Instead, it stood still ...then leapt irregularly as though a minute was a variable from 30 to 90 seconds in duration.

Then where was time? Perhaps the clock was a crude, mechanical contraption to mark a more subtle passage of experience. With that, my attention turned inside to locate
the smallest discrete moment of time hiding behind the busy crowds of thoughts arising and passing away. Yet, no matter how introspective I became, how confined and directed my attention, I could locate no discernible, identifiable and distinct moment to the stream of changes in my body/mind. It was baffling, as if time didn’t exist except as an illusion created and sustained by crude time-contraptions like clocks and less-crude distractions like thoughts. Time was instead a continuum of change. Not a collection of moments of discrete and concrete atoms of experiences and reactions accumulating, but a continuum of processes...of some sort of transformation.

...and so time passed learning ABC’s and 123’s between recesses spent skipping double-Dutch and dressing Barbie dolls for social teas (or as a squeeze for Ken). Yet I remember little of it. How could one spend so much time in the temple of learning and remember so little? Boredom took its toll as I and others sought solace in alcohol, marijuana and LSD. It was dark, this deep dark chasm of a sad blue-black. Yet there was space, sufficient to rest one’s heart intermittently in its soothing grace. ...Boredom left me talking to telephones, gossiping and talking about nothing in particular, and otherwise gazing at my reflection. My mother lined the walls of our house with mirrors: “They make a room look larger,” she said. With three siblings and six of our various friends around at any given time, the walls were further populated with people replicating in reflections. I used to play a game arranging a triptych mirror in the bathroom in such a way that my own image reproduced itself inside an infinity of mirrors. In the dining room, as I sat on the telephone for hours droning on hours, I would watch my reflection in the tall mirror. It was then I learned to fix on my eyes,
inside pupils, to the point at which my awareness went... click...and I could watch myself from outside of myself; sometimes I found my form shifting and reforming as I did so.

In grade 13, I took on a special project on the subject of creativity, in which I concluded that meditation was the most efficacious way to educate for creativity. Having argued the fact, I spent the subsequent year convincing myself to spare the $80 to receive training in TM myself. As my classes at university drew to a close, I booked an appointment with an instructor, who gave me an elaborate initiation ritual and a short mantra to recite before leaving the room so I could practice. I settled into a deep calm, from which there arose the sound of a single sparrow singing in a nearby tree. The sweetness of that song filled me until there was no me, only song...as if I was hearing sound for the first time, as if my senses, long numb if not dead, found rebirth in its notes.

I practised this mantra diligently for the next six months, and initially the quality of my life and experience improved dramatically. I had a noticeable increase in both energy and willpower, sufficient to start to rise early, stop smoking and exercise regularly. Yet, I was alone in my efforts and soon isolation eroded my discipline and resolve, and with it other aspects of my life began to unravel. I became involved with a group of students interested in phenomenology and mysticism, with whom I shared heady conversations over backgammon and coffee. One of those friends began experiencing difficulties from doing too many drugs—street drugs combined with tranquillizers she’d received from a shrink. I suggested she might meditate. Feeling rather hypocritical having abandoned the practice myself, I tried meditating again. The very next morning I recited the mantra, and an image of two round lights appeared in my mind—one green and the other red. I found myself lifting my foot in the vision, clad in my very own tan
raw hide cowboy boots. My foot lifted in the air and came down determinedly on the green light. As I did so, it was as if I said “GO” and a flood of bliss arose in my body/mind. I didn’t quite know what was happening, but went to university slightly giddy that day.

This experience unfolded in a chain of events that led me to the door of an anthropology professor I barely knew, a specialist in Tibetan Buddhism. Within a week, in spite of an “A” average, I quit my near-completed degree program in Economics—to the consternation of my family and some of my friends. I learned to meditate, and within a few months found myself in Woodstock, NY taking refuge with the head lama of the Kargyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism—HH the 16th Karmapa. From there, I made my way to Europe, Greece, and Sri Lanka for a year, accompanied by the Anthropologist, where I had time to cook, study, meditate, and compose poetry. This period was my sojourn from the race, gracing me with sufficient recuperative time to face (albeit barely) what was to prove the blackest of nights.

...I now believe that the suffering that ensued was related to a medical intervention I had received as a teenager. This intervention was the result of an unconscionable series of decisions by manufacturers, medical doctors, my mother, and myself. It was not until many years later that I learned a possible connection between this intervention and my suffering, but suffer I did, without knowing why, from a barrage of physical and psychological sufferings of an extreme order. Throughout this period, I sought and found solace in Tibetan Buddhism and the community of friends I found there. Ten years later, when I found myself at the feet of HH the Dalai Lama during a “Kalachakra—The Wheel of Time” initiation, my suffering seemed the greatest blessing I
could have asked for. Not only because it led me there, but because it created a space and openness for me to begin to experience and understand the vast depth of this tradition and its teachers. It is to those teachers, friends, and the continuity of the Tibetan Tantric tradition that I dedicate this work.

I. Introduction

A. Culture, time, and globalization:

This study addresses the dialogue between conservation and creativity in culture; accordingly, it implicitly concerns the phenomenon of time. As Agamben (1993) argues, “Every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alteration in this experience. The original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to ‘change the world’, but also—and above all—to ‘change time’” (p. 91). To change time is to alter the way we remember and what we remember. In this study, I attempt to convey a sense of time and memory as continuity and change within a “traditional” education system facing the ruptures, accelerating forces, and collapsing spaces of modernity and globalization. Globalization, which is never really global but transnational or even post-national, as Appadurai (1996) suggests, is the prevailing term used to describe a constellation of phenomena characterizing a rupture in contemporary sociocultural experience and space/time. While Appadurai’s work focuses on the rupture generated by migration and global media on post-colonial Indian experience, this study considers globalization instead from the perspectives of migration and education, and, by inference, development, in post-exile Tibetan experience. In particular, it will focus on the disjunctures and conjunctures of Tibetan
traditions in the face of modernization, and how such modernization impacts on traditional and popular conceptions of freedom among Tibetan refugee nuns.

By "modernization," I refer to a sequence of events whereby a tradition comes into contact with and is affected by "modern" values and institutions, rooted in, but not necessarily enacted through, contact with Western European Enlightenment values and institutions. This "modernity" I and others (for example, Habermas, 1985/1987) refer to reaches back to Enlightenment thinkers, with distant roots in Descartes and Bacon but more particularly in the 18th century with Kant, Voltaire, and Mendelssohn to name a few. The values and institutions of "modernity" reached a pinnacle in the high modernism of the early to mid-20th century, reflected in its distinctive aesthetic and rationalized organization of the state. The aesthetic valorized technology and innovation, and paradoxically combined a celebration of the individual-as-creator with the anonymity of "mass" culture. This aesthetic is typified architecturally in the sky-scraper (named after a man or his company), poetically in the works of TS Eliot and Pound, and artistically in the cubism of Picasso. Eisenstadt and Schlucher (1998) identify the "original" European code of modernity as a particular construal of: "man's active role in the universe, ...the conception of cosmological time and its relation to historical time, the belief in progress, the relation of progress to history, the relation between the individual and the collectivity and between reason and emotions" (p. 4). Charles Taylor (1992) identified individualism and the rise of instrumental reasoning, and its impact on social, technological, and economic alienation as principal culprits in what he calls the "modern malaise."
Experience arises within the dynamics of a consciousness interacting with the world. It has an elusive quality insofar as we are necessarily inside of it, but also because it eludes quantitative control and representation. Although at its root experience and time are connected, if not synonymous, this relationship becomes obscured when time is represented. Historically, the tendency in “Western civilization” has been to represent time and indicate its passage with quantifiable spatial metaphors and markers. The Greco-Romans represented time as a repetitive circular continuity constituted of discrete though infinite instances. Aristotle recognized such circularity as metaphoric, but justified it because “human affairs...seem to be in a way circular, because all these things come to pass in time and have their beginning and end as it were ‘periodically’; for time itself is conceived as coming round. ...Hence, to call the happenings of a thing a circle is saying that there is a sort of circle of time...” (Agamben, 1993, p. 92). This cyclic understanding of human experience is found as well in the Buddhist notion of “the wheel of life” where suffering is rooted in the “cyclic existence” of sentient life. This focus on a geometric metaphor of time had the effect of situating time in the study of physics rather than experience (that is, culture or history). The notion of time as a circle constituted of discrete points or instances of duration reified the conception of time and experience as possessions of subjects to be accumulated, depleted, squandered or hoarded. This view proved resilient in spite of changes in the scientific conception of time, most notably the theories and evidence that time is a relational or relative phenomenon.

In the Christian conception, under Judaic and Zoroastrian influences, time became represented as a linear rather than circular phenomenon, as something propelled towards
eventual destruction and emancipation/perfection. Time as history developed a beginning and end—from Moses and the birth of Christ to its end in a messianic, universal redemption. At the same time, there emerged a sense of a clear distinction between a discrete human moment of time and an eternity of divine time. Eternity was the origin of time, while its linear appearance was an epiphenomenon of humanity’s limited perception. This linear perspective conserved the sense of time as a discrete, physical property with geometric and spatial dimensions, and in some cases even included the classical claim of an underlying circularity to time’s apparent linearity. For instance, d’Auvergne’s de Universo contended, “…whenever the wheel of time touches the wheel of eternity, the contact occurs only at a regular point in its rotation; this is why time is not simultaneous [and appears linear]” (Agamben, 1993, p. 96). With the Christian linear conception of time came an understanding of a disjuncture between the experience of time and its representation in signs, as indicated in Augustine’s The Confessions among others (Stock, 1996). His reflections on time framed Augustine’s theory of the separation between subjective and objective experience (p. 235):

What is time? Who can explain what it means, simply and briefly? Even when there is an understanding in thought, who can express it adequately in words? Yet there is no word that we recognize more readily or know better than ‘time.’

Augustine argued that “the present has no length” (Agamben, 1993, p. 95), because if one were to analyse a moment, one would only find the future drifting into the past. This is a nascent insight into emptiness as understood in the Buddhist tradition, where the present is constituted of no length (that is, time) but as nonetheless capable of being experienced. Such an experience is experience beyond conception. In the view
subscribed by HH the Dalai Lama and many Tibetan Buddhists, this experience is not a
mere negation of experience but constitutes an experience of the nature of experience
itself, which is clear and knowing. In such an experience, time, which is necessarily
conceptual as a measured phenomenon, cannot be posited to exist. So, while drawing
attention to the present moment can be said to be a Buddhist practice, it is not that such a
present moment is conceived to exist in some inherent or fundamental way; it is, instead,
an experience of empty, clear, luminous knowing.

As Benjamin (1968) and others have argued, the advent of modernity brought
with it a secularized experience of time, adapted from the earlier rectilinear, quantifiable
phenomenon but with no foreseeable end, just a continuous, uniform before and after.
Such a monolithic time continued to be conceived of as a series of distilled instants
analogous to geometric “points” in time. Agamben (1993) argues that:

This representation of time as homogeneous, rectilinear and empty derives from
the experience of manufacturing work and is sanctioned by modern mechanics.
…The experience of dead time abstracted from experience, which characterizes
life in modern cities and factories, seems to give credence to the idea that the
precise fleeting instant is the only human time. (p. 96)

Furthermore, the effect of this extension of the spatial (as points or lines) to apply
to the temporal is that, just as motion in space is reversible, so is the modern conception
of movement through experience. This is quite contrary to the Buddhist conception of
karma and the irreversibility of time. Even within the scientific community, the
recognition of this bias has led the Italian biologist Tiezzi (1996) to argue for a
reconfiguration of our understanding of nature from spatial to temporal terms:
...In my opinion, we apply a Gestalt of space to the concept of time. Space is reversible and isotropic, time is irreversible and anisotropic. In our thinking, time is an interval. For space we are accustomed to say: Sixty kilometres from Florence to Siena or 60 km from Siena to Florence. We do the same with time: 20 years ago or 20 years until the year 2016; whereas time should be thought of as irreversible and expressed in terms of negentropy, stored information, biodiversity, number of correlations, events, interactions.¹

This modernized isotropic, mechanized and spatial conception of time came to affect the narrative continuity of a human life, according to Taylor (1989) who argues that the 20th century “modern” aesthetic rejected both the optimism of disengaged reason as progress and of Romanticism as the re-integration of feeling and reason. In moving away from a linear conception of time as progress and an organic conception of time as a spiral or cycle, modern society also eroded the sense of an organic continuity and developmental growth to human experience.² “Some of the major writers we think of as modernist carry us quite outside the modes of narration which endorse a life of continuity or growth with one biography or across generations” (p. 464). According to Taylor, this displaced the centre of gravity from a sense of self to a flow of experience, complementing the inwardness that was the hallmark of the individualism of early modernism. Superficially, such a decentred inwardness appears to accord with the “traditional” non-modern Buddhist inward reflections on no-self. Yet the two differ substantially in that the Buddhist process of decentred inwardness is designed to realize interdependence rather than individualism, and specifically interdependence as it arise in a causal progression (karmic linearity) within a cyclic continuity (reincarnation in cyclic
existence) of time. Accordingly, for Buddhism the flow of experience has a directed, progressive trajectory, while the quality of such experience is of great import as it aspires to a state of perfection free of the suffering of cyclic existence and rebirth. This attention to causality and development corrects some of the nihilistic tendencies that arise with a decentred sense of self and identity. The decentred inwardness of 20th century modernism, for instance, is deeply imbued with nihilistic tendencies, which have deep roots in the Western Enlightenment tradition (Gillespie, 1995).

Accompanying mechanized time and decentred identities, modernity following WWI, according to Benjamin (1968) brought with it a "poverty of experience" characterized by a loss of what he referred to as "the aura" that gave perception its sense of authenticity and significance (p. 223). In its place grew an abstracted, mass re/produced experience in which the singularity of experience became lost. There may have been a flow to experience, but it became something mass produced and no longer unique, reflected in Pound's (1956) poem "In a Station of the Metro": "The apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough." This poverty of experience was ushered in by a disruption in what Benjamin called "historical time," that is, an experience of time that arose with the participation in stories of personal and collective pasts—the narratives of traditions:

It is as if something that seemed inalienable to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the ability to exchange experiences. One reason for this phenomenon is obvious: experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness. ...Experience which is passed on from mouth to mouth is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. And among
those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version
differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers. (p. 83-84)

While WWI served as the catalyst for such a dissociation from direct experience
according to Benjamin, Agamben (1993) argues that today such a state is pervasive and
no longer needs such catastrophes to come into being. Instead, it has become the very
condition of daily, modern urban life, where the experience of time has become bereft of
both history and direct perceptual experience. Our accelerating “rush” is mirrored in the
steadily increasing speed with which we communicate—in both writing and speaking—and hence in our interpersonal relations. Indeed, our estrangement from ourselves (as experience) and history (as tradition) has accompanied an equally troubling estrangement from one another. Paradoxically, the very pervasiveness of the effects of this acceleration and dissociation has made it invisible, or at least difficult to recognize, for those without the means to step outside its way of being. That would require either systematic analytical reflection, or, more effectively, the direct experience of a different way of being in time and hence in the world—that is, another manner of living in time and invention. Instead, tradition tends to be treated as some conservative and sentimental attachment to the past.

I use the term “tradition” to refer to a manner of living of human beings in a
particular space-time continuum. Traditions arise as uninterrupted cycles of narrative
(that is, time) and experience (that is, space). “Modernity,” on the other hand, can be
distinguished from tradition insofar as it arises as a rupture or jump (depending on
whether the change is perceived as harmful or beneficial). In this sense, while modernity
suggests an acceleration of temporal change and globalization its spatial equivalent, such
a dichotomous view is overly simplistic. In altering the way we live in time, modernity has impacted significantly on the way we live in space via architecture, transportation, and technologies. It has changed the way we "use" space—where the idea of using rather than inhabiting space is itself a modern relic. Accordingly, modernity and globalization are reciprocally related. For instance, the compression of space associated with globalization has been enacted through the compression of time created by "modern" technologies of information, communication, and transportation. Indeed, this temporal dimension of globalization is sometimes referred to as the global "now," a term used by Appadurai (1996) with early precursors dating back to Benjamin (1968). Electronic media in particular have contributed to the experience of global immediacy. Globalization has impacted most significantly on education through the migration of peoples—whether as refugees, foreign students, development consultants, foreign workers, immigrants, or tourists. With such migration comes the global movement of development dollars and hence of "values," and with them the modernization of traditional perspectives, institutions, cultural practices, and the systems of education that support them. In this respect, globalization and the process of modernization has been and continues to be reciprocally related, and nowhere more than in education.

B. Education in the global local/e:

Norberg-Hodge (1991, 1997), in her studies of ecology and culture in Ladakh, and Wolfgang Sachs (1992), in his call for "commoners" to reclaim the local "place" over the global "space," understand cultural knowledge to be situated in lineages of relations between local peoples and ecological niches or places. Coercive aspects of
colonial, neo-colonial, modern state and now global economic interventions continue to enact ruptures in local people’s connections to ecological, geographical, and symbolic (for example, cultural) situatedness. Aside from extremes of legislated and enforced changes, the process is complex and often involves the common people’s complicity as they attempt to negotiate global and local knowledge; they are not passive agents in the process. It is a dialogue in which the desires of the people interested in the continuity and wellbeing of their local cultures and places negotiate with what can be either a conflicting or compatible desire for the experience of the modern, global “now.” Again this reinforces the difficulty of representing freedom on a simple consent/coercion continuum. How free can people be said to be to negotiate potentially conflicting interests and desires when subject to subconscious manipulation by signs promising satisfaction in the absence of any tangible evidence or means to such satisfaction?

Norberg-Hodge (1997) criticizes globalization for its impact on the local autonomy and ecology of local, rural economies. She distinguishes between the Buddhist notion of *interdependence* and the global *dependence* generated by corporate globalization. While interdependence in Buddhism leads to a healthy relationship between the local and the collective, drawing on to the “unity of all life, the inextricable web in which nothing can claim a separate or static existence,” global dependence, on the other hand, threatens local economies and cultures. “Globalization means the undermining of the livelihoods and cultural identities of the majority of the world’s people.” Buddhism provides both a motive and means to counter this (p. 3):

In effect, globalization means the destruction of cultural diversity. It means monoculture. Cultural diversity is a reflection of people’s connection to their
local environment, to the living world. ... If globalization is bringing monoculture, then its most profound impact will be on the Third World, where much of the world's remaining cultural diversity is to be found. ... As Buddhist faced with the reality of a global economic system bent on destruction, we have little choice but to become engaged. Buddhism provides us with both the imperative and the tools to challenge the economic structures that are creating and perpetuating suffering over the world. (p. 3-6)

Local cultural differences necessarily involve some degree of educational differences, insofar as culture is learned or enacted through formal or informal education. While pedagogical differences exist within and between Western communities and states themselves, there are sufficient similarities across such differences to refer to a global (that is, transnational) phenomenon of modern, Western public education. This is the dominant form of education exported to the developing world, first through colonial and now through neo-colonial development initiatives. Furthermore, there are few alternative models of education readily accessible to modern experience that do not fit somewhere on the historical lineage of this European system, which grew out of industrial economies of the European Enlightenment and its related Romantic backlashes. Accordingly, "education" has become increasingly equated with this particular lineage and model, which includes a specific pattern of disciplinary organization, literacy practices, teacher-student relations, student-student relations, and critical styles (or lack thereof), which are often consistent across vastly diverse geographical and cultural differences.

This study is based on the author's experience living and studying in various Tibetan refugee communities, where educational modernization has been negotiated over
the four decades since their exodus from Tibet. I focus my study on a traditional Indo-Tibetan Buddhist monastic curriculum, which conversely developed over several millennia in an Indian and later Tibetan lineage unconnected to the European. I do so both to appreciate its considerable differences and to examine how those differences are negotiated by students reacting to various forces of globalization and modernization both in Tibet and in exile in India. Furthermore, the study concerns women—nuns—who were formerly excluded from the traditional curriculum under study. In this respect, the site selected for the study is itself a sign of the complex dialogue between tradition and modernity, whereby access to the curriculum by this heretofore disenfranchised group was procured in large part by the effects of global, modernizing development influences.

C. Traditions of invention and education:

Education is a significant site wherein our collective remembering and forgetting transpire, and so contributes to our experiences of time and continuity and connection with the past. With the term "education," I refer most specifically to formal, institutionalized, or at least systematized, attention and efforts both to "draw out" the unique and more "human" abilities and interests of students, while socializing them in particular worldviews and practices across generations. In the latter role, formal education serves as institutionalized remembering, both in the contents and process of explicit and hidden curricula. In this respect, formal education is in part a "community of memory," what Simon and Eppert (1996) describe as:

...structured sets of relationships through which people engage representations of past events and put forth shared, complementary, and/or competing versions of
what should be remembered and how. Within these relationships people make topical the significance of their understanding of past events, arguing over the reworking of narratives and images which embody and elicit living memories. What binds people within such relationships is the promissory relation of memory to redemption. (p. 17)

Memory, on which our experience of time is predicated, establishes a sense of interdependence, interrelatedness, and interconnection across various experiences, both within one’s own life and with those of others. Collective memory is encoded in “traditions,” which are not just memories but knowledge recreated in direct experience, often through rituals of engagement within formal and informal education. At the same time, the seeming extreme polarities of tradition/modernity, continuity/discontinuity and conservation/creativity are in part artefacts of conceptual language and its tendency to construct dichotomous oppositions. To reify such polarities distorts the complexity of lived experience. If such experience is to be located, it is in the ambiguous, generative space or gap distinguishing such concepts. Furthermore, only in such ambiguity where concepts somehow collapse can we assert a viable freedom that is more than conceptual; it is the promise of the experience of a freedom beyond words—a freedom to be realized.

Modernity, on the other hand, has tended to focus on freedom as procured and realized through laws, rational principles and reason or ratio—that is, as freedom of choice, thought and speech. The difficulty with such an approach is that any impact reason exerts on experience and decision-making is negotiated through desires, which are prone to unreasonably manipulate our reasons into rationalizations. Under such circumstances, even the crudest forms of usury and exploitation are rationalized within
modernism—both capitalist and communist. This has been further reinforced by a view of creativity in which it is purportedly necessary to destroy the old to create a space for the invention of the new, thereby exacerbating the perceived polarization of conservation/creativity. What has ensued is an acceleration of time and desire, which has planted the seeds of a growing sense of discontent, ennui, dissociation, disconnection, and alienation from both memory and direct experience.

The rupture between history as tradition and the experience of modernity arises as cultural and temporal discontinuity. In such a discontinuous state, even in the face of collective and personal acts of remembering through ritual, history is disengaged from any meaningful connection with daily experience. There is a loss of a sense of interconnection and interrelations across time, and so history becomes something remote and disengaged from our daily experience. In the ensuing void, the place of ritual is replaced with the consumption of the material signs of such traditions and memories without any corresponding connective transformation in experience. Rituals and traditions conserve qualities of experience across successive generations; in interrupting such traditions, modernity has left a paucity of experience in its wake, and a void to be inadequately filled by disposable consumer goods.

Accordingly, non-modern cultures like Tibet's, still steeped in the sense of ritual and the sacred, offer a window into a different view and experience of time, memory, tradition, and creativity. The creativity of the people tends to be expressed collectively rather than individually, and the remembering tends to focus on community traditions rather than on personal history. In the last four decades, Tibetans have attempted to conserve this collective memory, inscribed in Buddhist culture, texts, and educational
institutions, against the massive rupture posed by the violent invasion and occupation of Tibet by Mainland Chinese military forces. Accompanying and trailing this literal invasion was an equally violent and destructive symbolic invasion that was couched within a modernist development agenda. The Cultural Revolution became a concerted and violent attempt to enact the forgetting needed to bring about the creative “revolution” so characterized and coveted by the modern obsession with innovation. This concerted, violent attack on traditional culture has continued unabated in Tibet and China up to the present, in spite of the purported end of the official capital “C”-capital “R” version.

The opposition of conservation and creativity as mutually exclusive binaries has become so reified in contemporary life that terms like conserving, tradition, and even continuity have become pejorative in their conventional use, often associated with right wing views. Likewise has the overstated opposition between modernity and tradition encouraged a subtractive extremism, in which one is asserted to negate the other, or vice versa. What such subtractive logic overlooks is that to conserve experiences of time and patterns of relations as “culture” in the face of continuous change requires considerable creativity, inventiveness and even freedom on the part of the people participating in conserving such traditions. Indeed, more than anything else, culture is a creative strategy to conserve such experiences and patterns of relations across time. To focus on the cultural as creative, Clifford (1998) refers to “traditions of invention,” to correct some of the biases and dangers suggested by the idea of the “invention of tradition.” The problem with the conception of tradition as invented, that is, with “the invention of tradition,” is that it suggests tradition is comparable to any disposable human (marketable) product, something to be invented, consumed, disposed of, and re-invented for another market. Of
course, modernities and globalization/s are themselves culturally invented traditions of invention in the process of being passed down through generations. Attempting to understand alternative “traditions of invention” offers those of us concerned by the paucity of experience in the global “now” a means to begin to learn alternative strategies for integrating historical and inter/personal connections.

Overt colonial occupation and the forced modernization that tends to accompany it, as in the case of Tibet, is followed by a period in which overt violence becomes progressively supplanted by what Bourdieu (1991) calls symbolic violence. Symbolic power is exercised principally through the giving of a “gift” that creates an obligation in the oppressed such that their freedom is curtailed symbolically rather than through force or coercion. In such circumstances, domination and force become veiled beneath relations that appear reciprocal and voluntary. In the case of globalization through educational development, this idea of a form of power and violence exercised symbolically through the giving of a gift—for example, language, education, and economic development. The phenomenon of symbolic violence challenges the enlightenment dichotomy between freedom as consent and lack of freedom as overt force and constraint. As Bourdieu (1991) explains, “All symbolic domination presupposes, on the part of those who submit to it, a form of complicity which is neither submission to external constraint nor a free adherence to values. ...The distinctiveness of symbolic domination lies precisely in the fact that it assumes, of those who submit to it, an attitude which challenges the usual dichotomy of freedom and constraint” (p. 50-51).
D. The role of desire:

This introduces the rather paradoxical role of desire. More than any other factor, the power of want and desire drives the global development agenda—it gives the "now" its particular quality of urgency. After all, cultural and educational modernizations are not enacted exclusively nor even principally through top-down structures related to the movement of development policies, capital, and/or educational programs and teachers. The failure of development policies aimed at implementing medicalized birth control is a good example of the shortcomings of attempts to change desires through rationalized top-down policies and structures, except when backed by totalitarian state forces like those in Mainland China. Rather, modernization, in this case educational modernization, tends to transpire as an enactment of the agency and desires of students and teachers, and varies with their ability to articulate and communicate those desires within the system. This raises the question of the relationship between desire and quality of life when media and advertising intervene, which, in turn, begs the question: "Whose desires are being satisfied by the system?"

As Adorno (1957/1993) points out, "A mankind which no longer knows want will begin to have an inkling of the delusory, futile nature of all the arrangements hitherto made to escape want, which used wealth to reproduce want on a larger scale" (p. 156-157). The acceleration of time/change accompanying the global "now" can also be understood as an intensification and acceleration of desire. Under such pressure, people reach more and more beyond immediate, spatially-temporally situated experience in search of meaning and satisfaction. People are pressured to accept things they don’t or can’t have, and this creates a frustration and drive to push beyond local cultural,
economic and ecological limits. While the most obvious antidote to want is satiation, rather paradoxically, the route to such satisfaction is not necessarily through procuring what it is one desires. Even ordinary experience tells us that the act of receiving what we think we want can produce even greater desire. Strategies for eliminating want as a negative aspect of human experience are at the root of Buddhism, even in Tantra where a path is accessed by means of desire itself. So, to study Buddhists and Buddhism interacting in modernity offers a window into a deeper understanding of the role of desire in the process of modernization and globalization.

Benjamin (1955/1968), influenced by his in-depth studies of Judaic mysticism and the events leading up to the Holocaust, reflected at length on time-consciousness and the modern “now-time.” For him, the greatest expectations, those for justice and emancipation from oppression, are what drive experiences into a future, but emanate from the expectations of the peoples of history and the past. Benjamin argued that time in the modern consciousness was represented if not experienced as empty and homogenous, as if the past existed only implicitly in a crystallized, future-oriented present. He offered an alternative rendering of modern time as “now-time,” which was not even uniquely “modern” but a messianic conception of time, such as the Jewish idea that “every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter” (p. 264). It is a conception of time as something full of the creative possibility of desires and hopes arising from the past.

In my reading of his rather cryptic annotations, Benjamin (1955/1968) refuted the modernist view of progress, in which the present was represented as the culmination of a discrete series of past experiences accumulating like “beads on a rosary.” Instead, he
understood the present as arising from expectations rooted in past injustices. No doubt influenced by the events unfolding in Europe in the 1930s, he wished to interrupt the future-orientation of modernity's faith in progress by positing that the continuation of tradition could be secured as much by barbarism as by culture (Habermas, 1987, p. 14). Accordingly, he reconfigured the time-consciousness of modernity, founded as it was on the idea of progress as a continuum connecting a prehistory of tradition with a future-orientation of the present, to one in which the focus is instead turned towards the sense of responsibility towards the remembrance of the past. He argued that the present was not so much an empty, homogenous disjuncture in which tradition and innovation creatively moved into a future, but was instead a continual call to remember and remain accountable to the unfinished projects of the past—the desires of the past. In the process, he privileged remembrance over the modernist preoccupation with future-oriented revolution as the path to liberation and justice.

E. Freedom in modernity/ies:

Liberation and justice constitute two of the principal rallying universals of the Enlightenment. This century, these ideals became eroded as meaningful constructs as they became equated with unbridled capitalism and rational, self-interested individualism. Indeed, so dissociated have they become from modernity that its current incarnation as globalization has come under severe critique on the very grounds that it threatens to eliminate freedom and choice through a loss of cultural and local diversity. The principal perpetrator of this threat, according to Taylor (1992), is instrumental rationalism. He faults modernity on the basis of three principal malaises: 1) the rise of
individualism; 2) the disenchantment that comes with the primacy of instrumental reason; and, 3) the industrial-technical alienation arising from such instrumental reasoning and the loss of freedom, choice, and diversity it entails.

The experience of such modern malaise has given rise to post-modernist, feminist and cultural studies’ perspectives oriented on critiquing and correcting aspects of the Western Enlightenment project (for example, Foucault, 1965/1988, 1984; Lyotard, 1988/1991; Giroux, 1991, Bordo, 1987; Harding, 1991; and Bhabha, 1994). Others, like Habermas (1985/1987), in an attempt to salvage the Enlightenment’s promise of freedom and justice, have argued that modernity and rationalism are incomplete projects, which, in shifting from subject- to system-centred rationalities, are coming to address these shortcomings. Horkheimer and Adorno (1972/1996) launched an early critique of modernity claiming that the dialectic of the Enlightenment was self-negating and would lead inexorably to totalitarianism by emptying itself of all religious and metaphysical value with only power and self-interest remaining in their wake. One can see this in the degree of self-interest and corruption found and often tolerated in both communist and capitalist secular democracies today. In both systems, “commoners” exert little influence over their governance, while the gap between the rich and the poor has widened demonstrably in the last decade with increasing economic globalization. It is difficult to see Kant’s (1784/1970 version/1996) dream of freedom as an end to “self-incurred immaturity,” where “immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another” in today’s bureaucratized, technocratic and specialized society (p. 51-57). Adorno (1966/1973), responding to the Holocaust as the ultimate end of modern instrumental rationalism, argued for a philosophical rationality in which thinking
subverts itself through a negative dialectics to permit the emergence, expression, and recognition of both nature and experience. To do so, he contended, dialectical negation must be corrected of its tendencies both to reconcile opposites in idealized reconciliation and to forcibly suppress opponent views. It is this view I return to often as it closely approximates the Buddhist interpretation of the necessary ethical relation between reason and direct experience.

Another important contemporary opposition to modernity, not directly linked to the post- and late modernists' critiques, comes from those articulating a role for traditions to temper the excesses and ethical shortcomings of modernities. After Benjamin's early work on the interruption of historical narratives and time, the role of traditions in modernity has been taken up by some contemporary scholars, who differ in the extent of their critique of modernist values. These include Alisdair McIntryre (1984), Tu Weiming (1985, 1998a, 1998b), Robert Thurman (1984), Bowers (1993), and Thomas Berry (1988, 1996). These "traditions" critiques focus to varying degrees on modernity's deleterious effects on the experience and idea of community and ecological interdependence, its attempts to rationalize and devalue "habits of the heart," and its tendency to be mis/represented as a monolithic Western enterprise rather than as a culturally diverse manifestation. As Tu Weiming (1998) suggests:

... Underlying this reexamination [of modernity] is the intriguing issue of traditions in modernity. The dichotomous thinking of tradition and modernity as two incompatible forms of life will have to be replaced by a much more nuanced investigation of the continous interaction between modernity as the perceived outcome of "rationalization" defined in Weberian terms and traditions as "habits
of the heart” (to borrow an expression from Alexis de Tocqueville), enduring modes of thinking, or salient features of cultural self-understanding. The traditions in modernity are not merely historical sedimentation passively deposited in modern consciousness. Nor are they, in functional terms, simply inhibiting factors to be undermined by the unilinear trajectory of development. On the contrary, they are both constraining and enabling forces capable of shaping the particular contour of modernity in any given society. (p. 9-10)

Habermas (1985/1987) suggests that in this century, rationalism, the principal philosophical discourse of modernity (for example, Kant, Marx, and Habermas himself), became progressively dissociated from modernization as social, educational, and economic development projects, which now propagate under the phenomenon of “globalization.” Habermas argues the need for an ideal public sphere of rational debate to critique and keep in check the social and economic manifestations of modernity. He claims that this dissociation of modernity as a rational intellectual project from modernity as an economic development project may have enabled the exploitative and oppressive dimensions of economic modernization to propagate unabated. For him, modernity is an unfinished project, and it is the responsibility of engaged intellectuals to serve as ethical arbiters to ensure the project is carried to completion. So, although the economic and cultural manifestations of globalization are the factors most directly threatening the interests of “the local” as economic, cultural and ecological diversity, the modernist intellectual legacy has exerted a significant, albeit indirect, role. As Lyotard (1988/1991) suggests, “Capital is not an economic and social phenomenon. It is the shadow cast by the principle of reason on human relations” (p. 69).
Lyotard is referring to that particular manifestation of reason associated with the rational (Enlightenment) organization of society and property. What he neglects to consider is that other cultures with highly rational systems of thought did not generate economies organized to the same degree around personal, capital accumulation (most notably, in this case, Tibetan society). While reason is part of the human endowment, it arises uniquely across diverse cultural, even perhaps ecological, contexts. When “traditional” education systems are exposed to modernizing and globalizing influences, they come under the influence of certain approaches to knowledge and experience imported from other cultural and ecological contexts. As benign as modern education may appear to be, if Lyotard is right, it will nonetheless condition much more than intellectual ideas as its effects come to be felt in a community. It will directly condition a people’s experience of time, their desires, and the quality of their experience from something ecologically and historically connected into something more in accord with the dissociation and dispossession of late capitalism.

The culprit is not the form of logic of Western rationalism per se, but rather the complex colonial and culturally invasive education systems and practices used to instil it. Cummins (1988, 1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1992) calls this “cultural invasion,” a subtractive interaction between two cultures where a dominant culture is inculcated at the expense of the loss of a first or mother language and culture. As Cummins argues, formal education is the site where such invasion is most significantly enacted. His research considers immigrant experiences, but the model is applicable to the developing world, as attested to in the work of the African author and social critic Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s (1986, 1993)
commentary on the colonial legacy of the English language and education system in Kenya (MacPherson, 1997).

I have engaged in this critique of the globalization of education not to vilify global, modern education, but rather to convey the need to complement if not counter its culturally invasive tendencies with safeguards for cultural and ecological diversity. I have done so with the hopes that cultural exchange will become more creatively and reciprocally directed between the developed and developing worlds. In this particular study, I will focus on articulating such a space for Tibetan Buddhist education, with the hopes that others will take my cue and consider other formal and informal traditional or "alternative" education systems from the developing world in a similar way. Now I will outline the specific questions that guide this particular inquiry.

F. Questions to guide our inquiry:

1. Comparative theories of learning and knowledge:

What is different about the presentation and education of reason in the Indo-Tibetan tradition that makes its effects any different from elsewhere? How do such differences, in turn, interact with modernization? Differences in epistemology can create conflicts for students having to negotiate disparate home and school cultures. In the case of European secular rationalism, its epistemological differences with Indo-Tibetan Buddhism are not as extreme as with other religious systems because Buddhism rejects validation by scripture or the word. Nonetheless, there are epistemological differences, and in particular concerning the relation between reason and direct experience. It is important to consider how such epistemological differences are translated into the
educational practices and texts used to acculturate students into the monastic culture and system.

By conducting this inquiry as an ethnographic study, I am interested in juxtaposing philosophical [e.g. rationalized] narratives about reason and direct experience with the educational practices and lived experiences of my participants. Adorno (1966/1973) argues that where, in the Enlightenment, certain problems were set aside to prevent a dogmatic authority from deciding on what eluded rationality, eventually the very existence of such problems became dismissed on the basis of being too imprecisely defined. “What may or may not be reflected upon, however urgent, is regulated by a method blithely modelled after the current methods of exact science. ...Experiences that balk at being unequivocally tagged get a dressing-down: the difficulties they cause are said to be due solely to loose, pre-scientific nomenclature” (p. 211).

Similarly, I am interested in considering how the highly rational system of philosophical training found in Tibetan (Gelugpa) Buddhist monasteries interacts with the challenges of the lived experiences of students engaged in the training. What, if anything, is left out? The education of experience is conducted more directly in the meditative (tantric) tradition, formally studied in Gelugpa monasteries only after the conclusion of the 15-20 year philosophical (sutra) program of studies. Yet, students are immersed in living, not just in meditative experiences, and how effectively the system offers insight into those experiences bears significantly on the ability of the system to realize their collective and individual wellbeing. Is the rational educational system able to respond to the complexity of personal experiences, especially those that elude rational representation like sufferings associated with torture and genocide? What experiences
are legitimately addressed in the system and which ones are neglected or marginalized?

Do the rational and experiential streams of the education interrelate, and, if so, how?

2. **The outcome and purpose of knowledge:**

What are the purposes and ends of knowledge, and do they affect patterns of educational practice? In the contemporary modern Western context, knowledge tends to be driven by economic interests. This is not only a motive of the hidden curriculum, but is often explicitly stated in curricular rationale, even at the primary level in purportedly child-centred programs. Furthermore, in spite of attempts by such notable educational philosophers as Dewey (1929, 1916/1944) to place direct experience in the centre of curricula, abstract conceptual thought continues to be the desired end of knowledge. So, a student is a success if s/he graduates with good ideas (that is, expressed in essays and grades) and a job! In Buddhism, by contrast, knowledge is valued most explicitly for its soteriological or liberatory value, and, less explicitly, to build community cohesion. “Right” livelihood is one of eight aspects of the “Noble Eightfold Path,” the foundation of the Buddhist educational path. The emphasis of such livelihood concerns procuring the necessities of living through ethical actions. As Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) suggests, it is “a way to earn your living without transgressing your ideals of love and compassion” (p. 113). Furthermore, just as the end of knowledge is to be embodied in body, speech, and mind, so is the end of education. To realize knowledge, the historical Buddha advocated the threefold path of hearing, thinking and meditating. The question of what it means directly to realize and embody knowledge, and the path to such realization, pervades both Buddhist, and hence this, study implicitly if not explicitly. The very form of its composition seeks to be a mirror of realization.
3. **The relation between tradition and modernity in “global” education:**

This dialogue between reason and direct experience makes its way into dialogues, discussions or conflicts between what is deemed traditional and modern in the “global” modernization of education. I use the term “global” to indicate a large cultural and geographic span, but with the understanding that there is no monolithic “global” phenomenon. The conditions in which traditional education systems negotiate modernization—whether they are creatively open or imposed—offer an important indicator of whether such educational development is as a finely masked case of neo-colonial cultural and economic invasion, or benign socio-economic “development.”

Complicating the traditions/modernization relationship is the fact that modernization tends to introduce a particular conception of the nation state that, in the case of Tibet, was not present prior to the Chinese occupation. What are the points of overlap and tension between the rise of nationalism, part of the Tibetan experience of modernization, and their attempts to safeguard their traditions of Tibetan monastic education? In what way are traditions and nationalism compatible and in what way are they in conflict?

4. **Gender in Tibetan monastic and global education:**

My principal research site is a nunnery. Global development creates particular struggles for women, who often gain much greater access to education and personal development only to find themselves in direct conflict with traditional responsibilities to conserve ethnicity, traditions, and community wellbeing against the deleterious effects of modernization. Dolma Ling is a community of women, though some students prefer to refer to themselves exclusively as “nuns” rather than women. By whatever name, they are being educated for the first time historically in the traditional monastic curriculum, a
are being educated for the first time historically in the traditional monastic curriculum, a shift that has come through forces of modernity and globalization. What conflicts do women in particular face in negotiating modernity and tradition in a monastic educational curriculum? Also, after struggling to gain equal access to a system of education from which they historically were excluded, are the nuns of Dolma Ling able to adapt it to serve their learning styles, desires and needs? Can the curriculum be considered "gendered" in the masculine after excluding women for millennia from the system? How is the education system changing to suit more effectively female students? At Dolma Ling, how does the presence of a modern (that is, Anglo-Indian colonial-based) secular curriculum impact on processes of curricular change in the more traditional Buddhist curriculum? How do gender and nationalistic interests, in particular the liberation of Tibet from the Chinese occupation, correspond or conflict? Given 20% of the nuns were imprisoned and tortured for political actions in Tibet, their nationalistic sentiments are strong. Do these extend to a desire for emancipation as women? These are important considerations to untangle so that we might understand better the impact of global educational development on the quality of women's experience.

5. **Intercivilization conversations on “freedom” and “creativity”:**

In what way can a resuscitated conception of education as a path to a more ecological appreciation of freedom and creativity help realize forms of development that enhance the quality rather than the quantity of experience? By “ecological” I mean a form of freedom and creativity based in an understanding of the interdependence and situatedness of all experience. The ability to attend to experience more deeply can be learned such that one gets more pleasure out of consuming less. In a related vein, in what
way can education come closer to offering students greater degrees of satisfaction and wellbeing? How do competing modernist/traditional interpretations of freedom play themselves out in the context of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist educational reform? How do post-modernist and pre-modern (for example, Buddhist) views compare? How are creativity and change negotiated within such an educational system, and what are the circumstances that appear to facilitate or restrict such creativity?

II. Tibetan education: Historical and contemporary contexts

The principal impetus for this study came from a deep desire to understand and communicate my experience of the Tibetan religion, people, and culture. In this respect, I do not look through the lens of Tibetans and Indo-Tibetan Buddhism as just one among many interesting cases. They are a people who have conserved a highly rational and erudite literate tradition against centuries of Islamic, Western and Chinese colonial expansionary incursions. Only in the latter half of this century has Tibet come under significant modernizing influences, and then only under circumstances in which change was brutally imposed rather than willingly adopted through the imperialistic policies of the Chinese Communist regime. For Tibetans, it is a painful irony of history that the occupation and colonization of their country took place at the very time the rest of the world was extricating itself from colonialism. Yet, it has meant they have faced highly unusual and largely supportive circumstances in exile, where now many of the traditions so painstakingly conserved have adapted within an Anglo-Indianized and Americanized context. In India, Tibetans skilfully negotiate their interests in a modern, post-colonial
circumstance, trading a rich cultural and spiritual resource for economic, institutional, political and cultural survival.¹²

A. Historical context:

Buddhism developed in India from the 5th century BCE until the 13th century CE, when it was effectively eliminated from India, most probably as a consequence of a series of external (for example, Mogul aggression) and internal factors (for example, disciplinary degeneration¹³). It wasn’t until as late as the 8th century CE that it made its way into the high altitude plateau of Tibet, which was then dominated by an animistic religion called Bon. Systematic, formal and literate education accompanied Buddhism to Tibet, alongside the impetus to develop a written script based on the Sanskrit alphabet. Buddhism has relied heavily on its more rational education to lend it the resiliency and strength to establish itself across diverse geographical and cultural milieus. Unlike many other Asian religious traditions that remained tied to a particular culture (for example, Hinduism) or relied on force to accomplish expansion (for example, Christianity or Islam), Buddhism expanded across a large area principally through education—that is, through teachers, texts, and philosophical debates and teachings.¹⁴ Although feats of supposed magic and mystery enhanced Buddhism’s appeal to the popular imagination, it was systematic education and monastic institutions that secured its existence in the face of inevitable and often ruthless political and cultural struggles.

Tibetans identify the 8th century Indian Padmasambhava as the key figure to have introduced Buddhism in Tibet. With the support of the reigning king Khri-srong Ide-btsan (756-797), this Indian Buddhist yogi or mahasiddha, often referred to as Guru
Rinpoche, was able to teach and impart the most esoteric of Tantric Buddhist lineages to the Tibetan people—what was to become the Nyingma or “Old School” of Tibetan Buddhism. This lineage was joined by three predominant lineages in succession—Karma Kagyu, Sakya, and (Kadampa) Gelugpa. As these lineages appeared, some schools emphasized meditation and mysticism and others monastic discipline and reason. Today, such differences are the most meaningful distinctions to be drawn between the four principal sects and their forms of education, apart from certain regional or local loyalties. All schools offer monastic education in both sutra (scholastic, rational) and Tantra (meditative, mystical, imaginal and experiential), but with significant differences in emphasis and practice. So, the Nyingma and Kargyu emphasize Tantric meditation with a “foundation” focus on the completion of a series of spiritual meditation exercises, whereas the Sakya and Gelugpa tend to emphasize analytical meditation and sutra-based training in reason and debate as their principal foundation and educational practices. Admission to monastic schools was open to all strata of society, except women, so long as one was ordained; furthermore, one’s ability to rise up through the educational administrative branch of the monastic system was based largely on merit and one’s accomplishments in debate. So, monastic education became an important avenue for upward mobility in Tibetan society, which was otherwise mired in aristocratic privilege. Even then, aristocrats and incarnate lamas (often from humble families) did have certain advantages over their cohorts (Goldstein, 1989).

Success in scholarship was a necessary step to ensuring the respect and power needed within a monastic community to secure, in turn, positions of influence within the governing institutions of Tibet. Although lay people occupied some cabinet and
administrative positions, these individuals were invariably sons of aristocrats. The most accessible path to upward mobility in Tibetan society was through the monastic education system, where intelligence or good fortune could compensate for less-than-blue blood. The most upward mobility was found in the educational administration of monasteries, which included the abbot and three “religious heads” or ucho (chanting master, disciplinarian, and principal). The managerial administration (financial) tended to be dominated by the children of aristocrats, and it was this group that tended to have the closest ties with the central government, also dominated by aristocrats (Goldstein, 1989, p. 31-32). Nonetheless, the upward mobility that did exist in the monastic system made its education of great social value, in spite of its being more preoccupied with abstruse points of epistemology and philosophy than with issues of political and social theory. Although the meditative tradition encouraged withdrawal and reclusivity, the scholarly education system developed a complex and reciprocal relationship with the secular powers and state. For these and other reasons, the system became entrenched and unprepared to face shifting circumstances. Furthermore, though the dialectical debate and scholastic tradition had merits, its association with the secular state gave it more power and influence than was justified by its scholarly and pedagogical value. In some cases such power was exercised against other less “scholarly” and “monastic” schools, as in the Jonang or later in the Nyingma cases.  

The effect of the political alignments between monastic society and the Chinese emperors, via the institution of the Dalai Lama, added to the highly scholastic education of the monastic system, was the progressive separation literate/monastic from secular/lay communities in Tibet. Even inside monasteries, literacy education involved an emphasis
on reading rather than on writing, which encouraged the transmission rather than creative adaptation of the Indian Buddhist system as it became established in Tibetan monastic culture. Furthermore, the male monastic community was considerably larger than the female, thereby gendering the secular/monastic separation by leaving a larger proportion of the lay community female. The further gendering of literary/oral cultural distinctions was bolstered by the fact that the nuns did not participate in the literate education enjoyed by monks, thereby tending to accentuate the separation even further. Tibetan scholarship became equated with Indo-Tibetan Buddhist [male] scholarship.\textsuperscript{18}

Lay people have access to less formal oral teachings given by lamas, generally in large, public gatherings, but on subjects quite distinct from the monastic education tradition. Although monks and nuns often join the audiences for such teachings, these studies are perceived to constitute informal rather than formal education for the monks and nuns. In the Gelugpa lineage, the group of Buddhist teachings commonly presented to such lay, public gatherings are commentaries on Atisha’s \textit{Lamrim} or “Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment” teachings. Atisha (982-1054) was an Indian monk who came to Tibet in the 11\textsuperscript{th} century; he distrusted the highly scholastic and rational tradition of dialectical debate, then popular in Indian monasteries (Dreyfus, 1997, p. 21-23). Atisha believed it was more important to apply Buddhist teachings to the experience of daily life in Tibet through analytical reflections on such topics as karma, suffering, impermanence, and the rare and precious human birth. While lay people did have access to formal instruction of this nature, they were largely excluded from the more scholarly activities of monasteries and hence remained largely non-literate with the exception of members of a few aristocratic families. Indeed, no viable secular system of education emerged in Tibet.
until long after the Chinese occupation of 1949. Until then, only the most privileged of Lhasa aristocrats sent their children either to basic training programs for public servants in Lhasa or outside Tibet to Darjeeling or other Himalayan hill stations to attend Jesuit-run schools. This further secured the political and secular power of the monasteries over the administration of Tibet, and contributed, many Tibetans believe, to their vulnerable position in 1949.19

Since HH the 3rd Dalai Lama in the 16th century, the Gelugpas maintained administrative control over Tibet, which was nonetheless so decentralized that such influence was difficult to meaningfully secure except in the region of the capital of Lhasa (the capital during and after the reign of the 5th Dalai Lama). The conservative administration of Tibet prior to 1949 served to keep colonial and modernizing influences out of Tibet through explicit policies, such as encouraging border regions not to feed or support any foreigners crossing from the Himalayas.20 These attitudes and policies kept large Christian missions and other colonial institutions of modernization out of Tibet. The first significant colonial incursion into Tibet came in 1904 with the English British invasion, and later in 1910 with the Chinese invasion that forced the 13th Dalai Lama into exile under the protection of British-India until 1913. So, while there was some knowledge of the world beyond their borders, Tibetans conserved a protective distance from the events of that world. The geography of Tibet, situated on a plateau that is over 15,000 ft. high, made such an isolationist policy easy to enact. The only problem is that it backfired when, after the 1949 invasion by Communist China, the world ignored the pleas of Tibetans for assistance, including the British who were in a unique position to vouchsafe and promote Tibet’s statehood status to the United Nations.21 Indeed, it was
the Irish, perhaps propelled by their wounded historical relations with the British, who finally introduced the subject of China’s invasion of Tibet onto the floor of the UN Assembly in 1961.

B. Contemporary context:

1. Tibet:

Following the intensification of the Chinese occupation of Tibet after the Lhasa uprising of 1959, over 120,000 Tibetans went into exile as refugees, seeming to fulfill Padmasambhava’s 8th century prophesy portending that, “when the Iron Bird flies and horses run on wheels, the Tibetan people will be scattered like ants across the world.” In 1959, Lhasa was bombed and, thereafter, what was left of the monasteries was further dismantled before and during the Cultural Revolution between 1966-1976. It is estimated that over one million people of a total Tibetan population of six million died during the years of the invasion and Cultural Revolution from violence, persecution and the starvation resulting from failed collectivization. Before 1959, the number of monks is estimated to have been between 16% to 25% of the total male population. Even the proportion of nuns, though substantially lower, represented the largest community of nuns in the world—27,000 nuns occupying 818 nunneries concentrated in the provinces of Utsang and Kham, with a small number from Amdo.

In spite of the fact that prior to the Chinese occupation most monastic and lay people alike led a materially challenged, subsistence existence in Tibet, afterwards Chinese persecution focussed on nuns and monks in particular. Between 1950 and 1970, those few who were able to survive did so by going into exile or by giving up their
monastic lifestyle. At the same time, their nunneries and monasteries were destroyed en masse and their religious art objects pillaged. Only 300 of Tibet's original 6,000 monasteries remain standing, and many of those have been rebuilt in the last 15 years. Access to these monasteries is tightly controlled and restricted, so that the desire to become a monk or nun in no way assures one can do so (TCHRD, 1997, p. 42). In exile, many of the Gelugpa nuns (the most populous school) ended up at Gaden Choeling Nunnery in Dharamsala. One of these nuns describes these years: “The Chinese at the time of their worst atrocities did not only destroy our nunneries, they also went to great length to eradicate the very concept of nunhood from the minds of Tibetan women, but in vain. It lives on in many of our sisters in Tibet, and those of us who were able to escape to India and those who have not even become aware of it yet” (Devine, p. 17).

In 1980, during a fact-finding visit to Tibet, the Communist Party general secretary Hu Yaobang found Tibetan infrastructure pitifully inadequate, the economy in ruins following forced collectivization, and the morale of the people devastated. He is purported to have told Party cadres: “This reminds me of colonialism” (Schwartz, 1994, p. 15). As a result, he recommended a six-point reform policy for Tibet that included reviving Tibetan culture, education, and science “within the socialist framework” (p. 15). It recognized the difference between the Chinese and Tibetan cultures and made possible a revival of religious and educational practices that had been violently suppressed in the preceding decades. During the ensuing years, serious negotiations began with HH the Dalai Lama to return to Tibet, who sent his brother and sister as his delegates to check conditions in Tibet in the mid-1980s. Thereafter began the dramatic revival of religion and a period of nationalist intensification again headed by the monastic community.
During the early and mid-1980’s, Tibetans were able to begin reconstructing some of the nunneries and monasteries while resuming some fundamental components of the traditional curriculum under the watchful eye of communist party cadres. By 1987, with the number of nuns and monks swelling, organized protests and demonstrations began in Lhasa, which were violently suppressed by Chinese military forces. Nuns and monks became central figures in these protests, as nationalism and religion became uniquely combined in the life and lifestyle choices of Tibetans. As these protests intensified through 1989, the Tiananmen Square tragedy and the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Peace to HH the Dalai Lama led to the closing of the borders of Tibet to tourism and a further intensification of military oppression. In the ensuing years, the Chinese regime focused their social control policies and practices on the nunneries and monasteries. This culminated in the banning of HH the Dalai Lama’s photo and the extensive re-education program of the mid-1990’s when surveillance teams of party cadres inhabited monastic communities, expelled dissident monks and nuns, and introduced additional courses on communist propaganda. Admission to monasteries and nunneries was severely restricted and many aspiring or expelled nuns and monks were forced to leave Tibet to pursue the traditional Buddhist monastic education in India.

During these years, a system of public and private secular education developed under the (People’s Republic of China, PRC, controlled) government’s supervision. Access to education in the Tibetan language is limited for the most part to the first few years of elementary schooling, while most secondary and post-secondary education continues to be conducted in Mandarin. As outlined in a study conducted by the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD, 1997), these discriminatory language
policies combine with culturally invasive curricular contents to undermine the Tibetan language, culture and religion.\(^{28}\) Tibetan history and culture are steadfastly ignored in the curriculum, and when they are present, they are denigrated in an ideological manner. The TCHRD reports that 93% of the children they interviewed received no education in Tibetan history or culture during their years of schooling inside Tibet (p. 46). Also, Tibetan children have been targeted for brutal corporal punishment typical of racist attitudes and policies in colonial circumstances.\(^{29}\) Adding to this mistrust of the Chinese dominated education system is the fact that many academically successful Tibetan students have been removed from their families and taken to Mainland China.\(^{30}\) When they return, they are often hired in entry-level positions as prison guards to oversee the punishment of Tibetan political prisoners\(^ {31}\).

As a response to this abuse, and out of a desire to conserve their language and culture, Tibetan parents, even senior government cadres, have continued to send their children, sometimes unaccompanied, into exile in India where they are educated and cared for by the exile community. One 12 year old boy interviewed by TCHRD (1997) was sent to Dharamsala “in order to receive education and because his parents feared that if he spoke only Chinese in school he would lose his Tibetan Background. He was also afraid of ill-treatment by the Chinese” (p. 68). In this case, the boy had been punished severely in his schooling in Tibet, “lash[ed] with a rubber whip” on his bare bottom repeatedly. On one occasion, a Chinese student tripped on him and said he had done it intentionally. The teacher made the Tibetan boy get sand which he mixed with broken glass and water. “I then had to kneel for one hour this mud. The glass cut into my knees and into my feet. It hurt very much and my knees were bleeding. ...I still dream about it.
He was subsequently sent to a hospital where he received stitches and remained for a month with a related infection. Another Tibetan boy who received a similar punishment ended by having his leg amputated. So, Tibetan parents continue to send their children into exile for an education. In turn, the Chinese administration in Tibet has banned sending children to Indian schools and enacted severe penalties for those who defy the ban. By eliminating access to education in the Tibetan language, history and culture, senior Chinese policy-makers intend to eradicate Tibetan nationalism by undermining the culture (see ICJ Report of 1997; or Tibetan Information Network).

2. **In exile in India, Nepal, and elsewhere:**

There are now Tibetan Buddhist nunneries, monasteries and branch monasteries established throughout India, Nepal, and in various sites in North America, Europe, Australia and elsewhere. The three large Gelugpa monastic universities (Sera, Ganden, and Drepung) were established in South India, and house about 5,000 monks each, many of whom come voluntarily or are sent by their parents from Tibet. These monasteries offer secular programs for young monks, as well as the traditional philosophical debate curriculum. The dialectical debate program takes about 15 years to complete, and culminates in a *geshe* degree. The most distinguished of the geshe degrees is the *geshe lharampa*. After graduating with a geshe degree, the most serious will attend a two-year post-graduate program in Tantric meditation in one of two Tantric colleges—Gyume in South India or Gyuto in Northwestern India (there is a new branch in the Kangra valley). Much of this two-year period is spent in meditation. Other monks graduate from the debate program and go on to become administrators or teachers at the monastery, and more recently it has become very popular to go to the West, especially to the U.S.A.
There continue to be a smaller number of nunneries, and those are concentrated in Northern India. Most of these nunneries are administered or supported by the Tibetan Nuns’ Project, a joint Western and Tibetan women’s initiative to support the nuns. The curricula vary in emphasis, but many have instituted traditional debate programs, though as yet no nun has been graduated with a geshe degree. Many combine secular courses with the more traditional subjects and activities. Other nunneries, such as the Nyingma Shungsep Nunnery in Dharamsala, emphasize rituals or meditation. Also, there is a growing interest in service vocations among nuns and monks, a recent innovation and possibly a result of increasing exposure to the Catholic model of monastic life.33

The secular system of Tibetan private and public schools became as extensively developed as the monastic programs early on in the establishment of the Tibetan exile communities in Nepal and India. Under Nehru’s direction in 1961, the Indian government immediately designated numerous large public schools for Tibetan refugee children, as for example those found in Dalhousie and Darjeeling (Samten, 1994, p. 20). At the same time, HH the Dalai Lama established a successful network of private residential schools called Tibetan Children’s Villages for those left orphaned by the large number of Tibetans who died in Tibet and during the early years in exile in India and Nepal. Today, Tibetans continue to send their children into exile to be educated in these TCVs, many of whom return to Tibet after graduating. By 1985, most students attended one of the 35 public Tibetan schools jointly administered by the Tibetan Department of Education in Dharamsala (DOE) and the (Indian) Central Tibetan Schools Administration. The DOE independently funded and administered 16 other schools, while 14 privately funded schools such as the TCV’s continue to be administered
independently. At the same time, there were 15,000 students out of a total population of 100,000, which suggests they enjoyed near-universal education. The curriculum in the Tibetan schools, both public and private, employed English as the language of instruction until the early 1990's when there began a Tibetanization program in many elementary schools (Samten, 1994). The curriculum is based on the Indian system, which was fashioned on the British colonial system of education with its Western organization of subjects and teaching styles, with some local content.

India continues officially or unofficially to tolerate the arrival of “educational” refugees from Tibet, in spite of the consistent and sometimes virulent opposition of the Mainland Chinese government. The reasons for this support are complex, and include the historical spiritual and cultural connections between Indian and Tibet, and the ongoing political tensions between India and China. Young children, monks and nuns are still able to stay without interference from the Indian government, though they may find it difficult getting documents to travel outside of India. In the last decade, a large number of uneducated or poorly educated Tibetan youth (that is, 16-25 year olds) have come to India in search of education. The Indian government tends to tolerate these youth, who have no official recognized refugee status. They are housed and accommodated in one of a number of craft and education centres designed to train and educate them. These institutions keep the local officials at bay by bribery and diplomacy, such that if and when their program ends, if they haven’t secured a job and permit, the Tibetan students have little recourse but to leave India (to the USA, Europe, or back to Tibet).
3. **Dolma Ling:**

The principal site of my research was Dolma Ling Nunnery and Institute of Dialectics. It was established in the early 1990s to respond to the increased number of nuns coming into exile in pursuit of religious and educational freedom. Some of these nuns—roughly 20% today—spent time in prison, many of whom were tortured during that period. Others were expelled from nunneries or unable to gain admission to nunneries whose numbers were tightly restricted during this time. A large number of the nuns—60% at the time—came as part of a large group of nuns and monks who completed a two-year prostration pilgrimage across Tibet from far-eastern Kham, only to be denied entrance to Lhasa, their destination. So, instead they went into exile late in 1990 to Sarnath, where HH the Dalai Lama was giving a Kalachakra Initiation. I attended that Kalachakra, and afterwards went on to Dharamsala where I first met the nuns where they were temporarily housed. One year later I joined them in the Kangra Valley where I taught them English and oversaw their immediate medical referrals and first-aid needs. The nunnery now has property and newly constructed buildings which continue to expand. Most of the construction was financed by Western donors.

The nunnery is administered jointly by the Tibetan Nuns' Project (Tibetan women, lay and ordained, as well as Western lay women) and a nunnery administration (Principal, teachers, accountant, drivers, cooks, and so on). During my research tenure there, the Principal was Gen. Pema Tsewang Shastri who had spent years as a TCV principal in Kulu-Manali. He instituted and integrated a comprehensive secular system with the more traditional philosophical debate program. This is unusual given most secular programs, if present at all in monastic institutions, are kept quite distinct from the
Buddhist dialectical debate program. The administration based Dolma Ling’s debate curriculum on that developed in the equally innovative Dialectic School in Dharamsala, from which it draws many teachers, and in the southern monastic universities. The nunnery struggles to find and to keep both secular and philosophical debate teachers, in spite of its beautiful location and fairly generous salaries. Although a large number of monks graduate with geshe degrees every year, as yet Dolma Ling has had no debate teacher with a geshe degree. This is a continuous struggle and concern for the administrators of the nunnery.

There are complex reasons for the difficulty Dolma Ling has experienced getting and holding onto qualified Buddhist debate and philosophy teachers, but there is little question that at root the problem is sexism. The education of nuns is being improved and financed largely through the support and pressure of Western (women) donors. While there is a stable and committed number of lay Tibetans in the administration of Dolma Ling and the umbrella Tibetan Nuns’ Project, they are a small number (five or six). Part of the difficulty is the fact that Tibetan nuns only hold novitiate ordination because the full-ordination lineage of nuns died out in Tibet. So, Tibetan people believe that the merit accrued from helping nuns is less than the merit accrued from helping monks. While the nuns tend to align themselves with the community of monks, in my time in Sera Monastery, I did not find the male monastics reciprocated those sentiments as a general rule. There are, of course, exceptions. One monk who teaches the nuns, a graduate of the Dialectic School and hence not a geshe, was very committed and appeared to see it as a permanent job. The indifference of the monastic community to the plight of the nuns can even become belligerent when faced with the prospect of the nuns
becoming geshes (from a conversation I had with a Sera monk). The southern monasteries will need to agree to graduate any nuns as geshes who complete the full monastic education process, so this issue must be more directly addressed at some point. At present, the nuns’ principal monastic ally seems to be HH the Dalai Lama, which is of great significance but regrettably insufficient.

The principal tenure of my research at Dolma Ling was between October of 1997 and June of 1998. During the winter months (Dec. 15-Jan 31) I went to the south to visit Sera monastic university and to the north to visit Bodh Gaya, where HH the Dalai Lama was giving teachings on Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy. During my period of tenure at Dolma Ling, there were about 150 nuns registered at the nunnery. 10% of those nuns were from the Indian and other non-Tibetan Himalayan states; all the remaining nuns were refugees from Tibet—a small portion of day students but most full-time residents. The nunnery was building several new residential wings at the time, but the construction work was progressing slowly. In addition, there were classrooms, a temple, a library, offices, workshop space, a guesthouse, staff housing, gardens, a kitchen, and a dining room (see photos). Next door is the large Tibetan arts community, store, museum and temple, Norbulinga. Beyond that is the small Indian community of Moli, and, beyond that, in one direction, Dharamsala and the Tibetan community of McLeod-Ganj, and in the other, the city of Kangra.

I have included photographs to convey the embodied nature of the debate and Tantric arts (for example, the mandala). Given the importance of colour and direct experience in this dissertation, I felt it important to give the reader some flavour of the rich textures, colours and experiences difficult to convey in words alone. Educational
practices that know few analogies in the Western system, like mandalas and dialectic
debate, are much easier to appreciate when experienced visually or directly, to
complement the more abstract explanations and texts. Although this study began as an
ethnography, it has become so permeated with Buddhism that it has become more of a
hybrid Buddhist-social scientific method. So, in the next chapter, I introduce Buddhist
theories of validity (vis-à-vis reason and direct experience) and some of its practices of
compassion and mindfulness to articulate a form of research that is more compatible with
Buddhism. Not only have I done so to harmonize it with the views and values of those I
am studying, but also because I am convinced that the Buddhist understanding of learning
and education has something to offer social research and education in general.
Notes:

1. I attended a talk Tiezzi gave at Cortona, Italy during the "Science and Wholism" conference convened there by ETH-Zurich in Sept. 1999. He discussed this and other topics related to ecology and time. John Wolf Brennan, who also attended this talk, sent this translation to me via email (hence no page noted).

2. See Jean Jacques Rousseau (1964, 1987/1996) for some classic representations of the Romantic view of a more organic and developmental view of time and experience. In Rousseau's (1964) Julie, for instance, the author argues: "'Nature,' continued Julie, 'means children to be children before they become men. If we deviate from this order, we produce a forced fruit, without taste, maturity, or power of lasting; we make young philosophers and old children. Childhood has ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling peculiar to itself. Nothing is more foolish than to wish to substitute our own: I would sooner expect a child to be five feet in height than to be able to reason at ten years of age" (p. 28).

3. For instance, there is a tendency to see traditions as conservative and modern culture as creative. In fact, all cultures have traditions of creativity and invention. For a discussion of forms of creativity across diverse cultures see Lavie, S. et.al. (1993).

4. Picasso, in a typical spirit of high modernism, said: "The artist must kill his father" (documentary, A&E Biography, 1999). In a climate in which the novel invention is perceived to be in conflict with, and superiority to, the mastery of tradition, then individual production will come to supplant in importance and value apprenticeship and the sharing of skills and aesthetic appreciation. In such a context, one would predict a devaluation of the arts because of the alienation of audiences and even students from traditions of invention and creativity.

5. While there was a considerable loosening of controls and sanctions restricting the expression of Tibetan culture in the mid-1980's, the ensuing pro-independence activities led to a systematic targeting of religion and culture as the source of the independence movement and hence of repression. By the mid-1990's, this resulted in the Re-education Program in monasteries. Repression in Tibet tends to be followed by similar policies in Central China. So, for example, following the harsh crackdown on protests in Lhasa in 1987-88 came the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, and following the Re-education policies in Tibet begun in 1994 came the crackdown in 1999 on the Falung-gong movement in Central China.

6. For discussions of desire in Buddhism and its application to issues in Western education see my earlier papers (MacPherson 1996, 1997). For discussions of desire in colonial perceptions and practices, see Young (1995) and Stoler (1995).

7. I use "modernity" here in the singular to signify the fact that all the various modernities that arose directly or indirectly from the Western Enlightenment participated in some way in addressing these universal "ideals," albeit in very different and even contradictory ways.

8. In his doctoral research, Peter Urmetzer (1999) chronicles this widening gap in Canada.

9. I use the plural here to indicate that modernization has taken very different routes across diverse cultures. This is the thesis of an upcoming edition of the journal Daedalus (Spring, 2000) looking at late modernities and of an earlier edition (Summer, 1998) that looked at Early Modernities. Yet as the authors indicate, these originary codes have been altered significantly as forces of modernity moved outside of Europe, where they developed unique cultural and institutional expression. This is the meaning of the pluralized "modernities." As the authors argue, "The cultural codes of modernity...have been shaped by the continuous interaction between the cultural codes of these societies and their exposure to new internal and external challenges" (p. 5).

10. This is the case in British Columbia, where the K-7 Instructional Resource Package, the official curriculum of the province, identifies the creation of human resources as the outcome of the system, even at the kindergarten level. This contradicts the supposed child-centred philosophy of the system, and reflects the conflicts between the contributors to the program, which included business and labour interests in addition to professionals and educators.

11. One effect of this has been to place the fate of Tibet in the hands of modern institutions like the UN, an organization from which Tibet is excluded because of the very historical isolation that enabled it to conserve its culture and tradition during the colonial period. While Tibetans have no representation on the UN, China, its aggressor, has veto power. So, Tibetans resort to extreme forms of non-violent or self-sacrificial actions to attempt to negotiate their position within the UN (MacPherson, 1998).
A South African colleague recounted visiting Nepal in the sixties with her husband, where they were met by a surreal scene of Tibetan monks, lamas, and lay people in exodus from Tibet being greeted by young, white Western people collapsing inchoate on cannabis, if not heroine or LSD. How strange the world sometimes seems.

This came to me by way of HH the Dalai Lama (personal communication). Apparently the Moslem repression of Buddhism in the 11th and 12th centuries in India was furthered by the perceived profligacy of Buddhism that came with a too loose and open Tantric practice—monks dropping their robes and taking up consorts, drinking alcohol, and manifesting a form of spirituality that went beyond and often transgressed strict, monastic discipline and vows. This made Buddhism very vulnerable to criticism and attack by more abstemious Moguls.

This may be true as well for Confucianism, which like Buddhism, can be called "an enlightenment philosophy." Enlightenment philosophies are those based on reason and education, with an end to an appreciation of universal freedoms, rights, responsibilities, and laws. This is a term applied to Confucianism by Prof. Tu Weiming (1999, personal communication) and to Buddhism by Prof. Robert Thurman (1984).

A lineage refers to an unbroken succession of teachers and students, while the school refers to the institutions, texts, educational and meditative practices that emerged around a certain line of interconnected lineages.

Dreyfus (1997) makes the same claim in his comparative study of Gelugpa and Nyingma monastic universities in South India. He says the real distinction between the two curricula is the worldview to which students are enculturated—a sutra and tantra worldview, respectively.

This may have contributed to the recent tragic conflict between the southern monasteries, principally Seramey and Ganden, and the Office of HH the Dalai Lama, over the latter's attempt to discourage if not ban a particular practice of placating a protector. This practice was seen as aggressively inimical to the Nyingma school, and encouraged what HH the Dalai Lama referred to as "fundamentalism." Gareth Sparham (1998, personal communication) speculates that this fundamentalism was principally the wish to return to a time when the monasteries wielded strong political and secular power.

There are some significant though rare exceptions, such as an early, pre-Buddhist animistic text on the signs of the raven (Rabsel, 1998).


This is recounted by Heinrich Herrar (195-) in his book Seven years in Tibet, where he and his companion were denied food and provisions shortly after reaching Tibet after escaping an Indian prison during WWII.

The negotiations following the British invasion were conducted exclusively between Britain and the government of HH the 13th Dalai Lama. The fact that no Chinese representatives were consulted is a precedent that could have been used to further Tibet's claim that it was a sovereign state invaded by China, and so win the support of the UN. Indeed, the British were in a unique position to understand the basis of Tibetan cultural and territorial claims. Yet, they backed down from supporting the Tibetans in their hour of need, and came to advise Nehru to do likewise to minimize the possibility of aggression from their northern (Tibetan, hence then Chinese) borders.

Some figures go as high as 1.2 million people, but such estimates are at best very rough. This figure comes from a pamphlet from the Canada-Tibet Committee in Vancouver. Most of the figures come from such politically-motivated sources. The fact is that it is impossible to arrive at an accurate figure given the lack of a general census and statistics on pre- and post-invasion Tibet. Even today, demographic figures provided by Mainland China are unreliable and should be considered suspect. For example, they only treat "Tibet" as a small plateau region of the territories inhabited by ethnic Tibetans (whose regions include parts of Chinese provinces such as Szechuan Province). These figures tend to underestimate figures on Han and other non-Tibetan population transfer figures, for which they have received international censure.

Indeed, one report (TCHRD, 1997) claims that every third child (son?) was sent to a monastery, which would put the figure even higher than that quoted in the text.


The late Tara Rinpoche (personal communication) told me that he too, even as a senior reincarnate lama, lived through the cold Tibetan winters with little heat and subsistent food and lodging. The Tibetan plateau is a marginal ecosystem, unlike the more highly populated Tibetan-Himalayan valleys of Kham and parts
of Amdo. Some of the largest monasteries and universities were situated on the plateau, where there was little water to bathe in, nor opportunity (i.e. respite from the cold) when there was. It is not uncommon for people in Western Tibet to live on barley flour (tsampa) and tea through the winter (Tenzin Atisha, OIHR, personal communication). Tibetan continue to have one of the shortest life expectancies in the world; when I taught the nun in 1992, for instance, most of them were 10-15 years younger than me yet many had lost their mothers and were shocked to learn that my grandmother was and continues to be alive.

26 For more detailed explanations of the issues and human rights abuses in Tibet, see Lazar (1994), Schwarz (1994), and Amnesty International (1996).


28 In my research, I found this to be true of Utsang and Kham in particular. Amdo has a reputation for being more literate and, perhaps because of their geographical proximity to the Uighers who have access to education in their first language through to post-secondary levels, the Tibetans in this region of what is now Quinhai have access to education in Tibetan up to post-secondary level. Indeed, there is a large teacher education college in Xining, one of the largest cities, where Tibetans learn to be teachers for the numerous public schools that offer classes in the Tibetan language. In exile, it is often these students from Amdo that become the leading journalists, scholars and social critics who are capable of taking on the nationalists project with a critical awareness of Tibetan culture and history.

29 This information comes from an extensive series of interviews with children sent into exile to be educated by the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Dharamsala (TCHRD), (1997).

30 TCHRD (1997) quotes Chinese sources that state that “29 provinces and municipalities in China had formed ‘Inland Tibetan Classes’ with a total enrolment of 12,590 Tibetan students, including 6509 of lower middle school, 1604 of senior middle school, 3195 of secondary vocational schools and 1282 of secondary normal schools” (p. 52).

31 As I point out in Chapter 4, one of the more literate and intelligent nuns, who I call Osel Khargyen, had a brother who had been taken to China to be educated. When he returned, he was given a job as a prison guard. She was later put in prison for her political activities, where he would visit her. This shows the divisive effect that politics and education exert on the personal lives of Tibetans. The prison guards used to torture Tibetan political prisoners are often Tibetans, a fact that causes great distress to the prisoners (1992, in my own interviews with the nuns).

32 In an attempt to control this exodus of young Tibetans to Dharamsala for education, the government threatened all government employees with loss of position if they were found to have sent their children into exile (T.I.N.).

33 Traditionally, the service role of monastics was limited to politics and medicine, and education to within the monasteries by and large. Many of the TNP and Tibetan lay administrators of the nunneries have been exposed through education or experience to the model of service orders in Catholicism. Also, there have been repeated exchanges between Roman Catholic orders and Tibetan Buddhist monastic orders in recent years. These may have encouraged the service model of education and training. Also, HH the Dalai Lama encourages some degree of such service. In Dolma Ling, for instance, several nuns are being trained in program to educate monastics to become Tibetan language teachers, and some others are being trained in health care work. These nuns express the desire to be teachers, doctors, and nurses not just for nunneries but in secular society. These days, monks and nuns can be found employed or working as secular school teachers, environmentalists, Tibetan medicine doctors, and politicians. Indeed, the nun in charge of the Tibetan Nuns’ Project, Ven. Losang Dechen, was employed as a teacher in a Tibetan school prior to taking on her role with the TNP.

34 These figures come from the Council for Tibetan Education, 1985, as they appear in Dhondup Samten (1994).

35 Though some monks and nuns and lay people are strict political refugees in that they are fleeing potential torture, incarceration, and isolation for their political sentiments and actions, most by far come for access to education (and indirectly, for access to their culture). Access to education is not recognized as a viable cause for claiming refugee status but it is my hope that there will be increasing discussions of the need to do so. Access to culture and education are recognized as a right by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (TCHRD, 1997), which suggests that denial of such access constitutes an abrogation of fundamental rights. Some good sources looking at the question of language rights (in education) as human rights are

36 A recent example is the exodus from Tibet of HH the 17th Karmapa, who India appears willing and ready to offer refugee status in spite of the vociferous objections of the PRC. This may not be entirely altruistically based, as China attacked India’s borders in the early 1960’s and has since provided nuclear weapons’ and political support to Pakistan, India’s rival.

37 This information came to me through numerous interviews with these students. Also, I worked on several development project in the early 1990’s that worked with some of the programs for these youth in Bir, HP, India.

38 For a detailed account of this pilgrimage, see Myers (1997).

39 The principal financier was the German government through the Green Party (via the Heinrich Boll Foundation), as well as individual Tibetan, Swiss and some US sponsors. The guesthouse was funded by CIDA (Canadian government).

40 I do so aware of the historical tendencies and problems in representing and “making strange” those of non-Western cultures (Edwards, 1992). I have tried to include only those photos that assist the reader to visualize the context in which the study was conducted. Most sites used to research Western educational are familiar to most readers, and these become images “read” between the lines of texts. I have included the photos in part to interrupt those images so that the reader recognizes that we are dealing with a complex combination of cultural difference and similarity.
YELLOW: ...path

Chapter two...
Oblique yellow paths:

Oblique yellow bands of illumination. That...certain slant of sunlight emerging from a frost-stained morning window. Light lingers on ice-crystals like so many stars, entertaining white before emerging yellow again to betray empty air as in fact constituted of thick dust and particulate matter. A Buddha in Bodh Gaya, his robes folding yellow in the hue and fashion of Tibetan refugee nuns. Outside in the nunnery garden, seed-laden Canadian sunflowers lean languidly amid the pervasive scent of a yellow rose, whose petals soothe and placate a certain yearning of skin. ...The sound of Louis Armstrong and Beethoven. The taste of lemonade. Raincoats and galoshes. Even Indo-Tibetan enlightened thought incarnates yellow in a sword- and book-wielding Manjushri. The bright borders of the Tibetan flag with its sun-as-centre, resurrected behind His Holiness the Dalai Lama in a flood of sunlight or in the yellow robe he greets us in as he passes by. The memory of a Madagascar citrine gemstone; dandelions, and their yellow-meaning-marriage (or not?) shadow on the underside of chin. Nicotine-stained skin. Dying leaves. Jaundice. Urine.

Yellow is the colour of the earth in classical Buddhist meditations, the ground I walk on...one foot lifts and reaches and places while the other lifts again... Moving between two places without resting in either one. Already moving into the other as I settle into the one. Motility in space/time, motility now and then...the memory of lifting, moving, placing...walking through spaces mind reconstructs as experiences in time. Mind memorizes... memorializes...and translates into experiences of time. Time as motion; time as change. Time as motility. Motility is the defining principle of life.
We interact across space-touching-space, as bodies appear to move through time and earth. Particles and molecules alter such that what was once of body becomes of the earth—earth becoming body becoming earth. The humous of the human. If matter moves readily across porous borders separating life from non-life, then what constitutes the difference? What is living? What is life? A history...a process, ...a gap, ...a gate? A gap as a gate to pass through, leading...

In one instance, to a yellow road in the land of Oz, where a young girl named Dorothy transforms the lives of her motley crew of companions. Of course, the tale transpires in a distant place over the rainbow because only in such a cultural and geographical imaginary world could a girl be realized free of interfering adults who have that nasty tendency to come to the rescue at the slightest sign of impending adventure! Well, a land free of most interfering adults, notwithstanding the witches and the rather pathetic expatriate professor, the Wise-Odd-Wizard of Oz. It is a documentary of hope journeying through the imagination, an archetypal odyssey that culminates in a homeland transformed—not physically but by a changed view—arrived at by a journey along a yellow road. All these years later, this is how I see the journey of my own life, and the research that has preoccupied the last five years of it in particular.

*Having written this about Oz, I go for a walk along Jericho Beach, In the parking lot, I see a man and woman walking towards me, laughing. Looking at me, the man calls out, in a jocular tone, “The wicked witch of the West is dead!” After wincing initially at the unwanted attention, I am struck by the strange coincidence of his words. Carl Jung called this “synchronicity,” a phenomenon suggesting relations between mind and matter are not what they seem. Co-incidence, indeed, but what is co-inciding?*
With Dorothy’s quest through Oz carved into the grottoes of my imagination, it is little wonder I learned to dream heroic scenes. At seventeen, I dreamed myself a student in a residential high school in England, with gothic stone buildings surrounded by a wall and moat. In the busy corridors on what I thought was an ordinary (dream) day, I began to notice that the students had peculiar, hypnotic expressions, and soon discovered that the school authorities had given them pills to put them under their control. As I tried to return to my dormitory, I was caught and taken to a basement room, where I faced a severe-looking man in a white lab coat who proved to be the school master. He handed me the pill, and though I pretended to take it, in fact I let it come to rest under my tongue as I performed the trance, which permitted me to leave unattended. I climbed the stairs and walked outside the building, where I spat the pill out on the ground.

It was dark that night as I made my way across the desolate schoolyard towards the stone wall, which I scaled with some difficulty. As my legs harnessed the top, my arms pulled the remainder of my body up. I stood to gaze at the horizon stretching into darkness on the other side. Moonlight glistened on the surface of the moat. I looked back at the antiquated stone structures, solid yet lifeless in the empty schoolyard. A certain intensity of feeling tinged with melancholy pervaded my mind as I vowed to return one day to help. Somewhere out there, beyond the mote, beyond the dark inchoate horizon now barely discernible, I would tell my story and return one day to help those I was leaving behind. Facing the water resolutely, I dove; my body slid inside the cold water of the moat like a second skin. Breathless with exhilaration, vitality, and determination, I swam rhythmically through its moonlit waves.
These days, the image of a Kalahari bush woman hangs in my hallway. Her finger points accusingly in my direction, under which is written: “What is your story?” The Kalahari believe everyone has a story, and if you don’t tell it you will be unhappy. I tell her so I won’t be sad. I tell her because happiness is my validity. In 1987, the search for such validity took me to another yellow gate—Yellowstone National Park. It was May and the tourist bus service wasn’t yet operative; so, I had no alternative but to hitch-hike rides from brush-cut stalky men under the looming shadows of rifles strapped to truck-cabins. Before my descent into the Yellowstone canyon, “wild” was derived from something you drank; afterwards, it was something I shared with all sentient hearts, even if most of us forget.

My Yellowstone education began as I returned late one afternoon to my cabin, when I noticed a herd of buffaloes approaching from behind. The buffalo had trampled someone to death that year, and so I began to walk a little faster. When I glanced back, I saw they had begun stampeding in the dust as the distance between us narrowed. The buffalo continued to gallop forward, while I tried to remain calm, convincing myself that what I was experiencing was just fear. I turned again to see the still considerable space between us narrow. It was then I felt a certain surge rise up in my belly—that particular sensation that is the determination to survive. I had never experienced such a desperate and distilled primordial will, and it washed all inhibitions and arrogance away as I ran unabashedly to safety. When I reached the cabin, breathless yet ecstatic with the sense of having earned the right to be there, the sign of that right was waiting at the foot of the cabin door—a tuft of buffalo hair.
The journey into the canyon of the Yellowstone River took about three hours. The trails were well maintained and easy to use, naturally illuminated with brilliant pink and gold oases of surging water and stone. At the trail’s end, framing the river, rose the spectacular yellow wall from which the river took its name. I set up my lean-to, hung my food on a distant tree, and began to prepare my cold dinner of trail mix, fruit, bread, and cheese. The sun set and my courage went with it. I jumped at the slightest rustle of a tree, as imaginary grizzly bears appeared in the shadows of the sounds. I calmed myself by looking at the stars and constellations, and comparing them to my new astronomer’s guide. The first constellation I recognized was Orion, with his large bow and arrow. I read the description attached to his name—*Orion, the bear hunter*. I laughed in amazement at the encounter between this universal bear hunter and the bear of my own frightened imaginings, all set in such wild solitude!

While the buffalo taught me to harness the force of fear, the bear taught me to move beyond it—courageously and with interest. The stars too had their lesson—the protection garnered from a shift in view. As did the field mouse who came to collect my hair as I lay down to sleep. She taught me the power of humour, for, thinking her a grizzly out for some dinner, I screamed in terror before realizing she was only...a mouse.

This journey to the canyon of the Yellowstone River is my model of the research journey. It introduces some of the same fears I faced in research, and the adventure and heroism needed to transform them. It reminds me that research is an endeavour of courage, and that the root of such courage is love. It is one in which many warn us away from our deepest interests, trying to persuade us to be “practical,” while still others call on us to be courageous—the human and non-human friends and mentors who help us on
our way. It is a journey in which we rely on plans and maps to find order out of chaos because we are afraid and confused. Yet, in the end, if open to the wonder of the world, serendipitous, “researchable moments” arise outside those plans and maps to provide the unexpected, living creative learning we hope for. Those are the moments of insight towards which the most powerful and meaningful ethnographic research is directed.

If the world we research is the wilderness, then our research method is the path through that wilderness. It is the path that enables us to enter that wilderness, a world we experience both as familiar and alien, as both inhabitants and outsiders. Our journey through that world is one in which we, as researchers, are transformed. Yet, the path is never prepared for us entirely; to some extent we make our path in the act of walking through that wilderness, and in doing so we change that wilderness just as it changes our direction. In this sense, research might be likened to a spiritual journey, a pilgrimage. Yet, in a pilgrimage, there is a known destination, a “place” that is the end and the catalyst for transformation. In research, there is no such place towards which we can direct our actions—no final end. So, perhaps it is better to understand our role as tourists—eco-tourists—in a foreign land. At least with eco-tourism one’s travels are designed to educate oneself and to benefit the world, whether or not they fulfil such a lofty aim. The idea of ethnography as tourism could add fuel to critics who complain of its exploitative and invasive characteristics. Yet, in the sense meant here, all ethnographic participants, both researchers and the researched, are tourists. We cannot really possess a land, its resources and cultures, but instead move through ecosystems and world cultures as guests relying on and co-creating natural/cultural environments for our mutual wellbeing.
(left) HH the Dalai Lama on his public throne, D'sala; (right) monks of Sera Monastery
The path of research:

...Aspiration for Culture and Knowledge:

The most excellent virtue is the brilliant and calm flow of culture:
Those with fine minds play in a clear lotus lake;
Through this excellent path, a song line sweet
like the pollen’s honey,
May they sip the fragrant dew of glorious knowledge.

HH 17th Karmapa, 2000

I. The research path as an “educational journey:”

Buddhism is presented through the metaphor of a path, signalling the natural, developmental, and transformative bases of its practices. Just as one travels a path to move through geographical space, so in Buddhism one travels an educational and spiritual path to move through experiential space. To do so, one simultaneously traverses both a graduated system of education and a spiritual life journey, whereby the path as rule and ritual becomes the path as the direct realization of our nature, which is clear and knowing. In this respect, the path in Buddhism is both culturally invented as education, and spontaneously realized in natural, embodied interaction with that path. Even the historical Buddha said the path (as realization) was something he discovered rather than invented, and hence something of natural rather than supernatural origins.

Buddhism is quite explicitly represented in educational rather than religious terms, as constituted of teachers, texts, and a community of students. Rather than engaging in worship, Buddhists tend to refer to themselves as receiving “teachings,” studying, or meditating. Furthermore, the soteriological end of Buddhism is referred to as wisdom, liberation, and enlightenment rather than “salvation” as found in paths of
religious revelation. A fundamental premise of this enlightenment is that it is replicable if certain causal conditions are met, and its path is accessible to anyone, so long as they have access to enlightened teachers (Buddha), texts (Dharma), and community (Sangha)—The Three Jewels of refuge. Emphasis is placed on learning—that is, on qualities of mind like attention, investigation, and interest. Even moral discipline tends to be justified by its effects on these other qualities. So, for instance, disciplined behaviour is said to cultivate powers of attention (that is, mindfulness) and tranquillity (that is, calm abiding). In Tantric Buddhism in particular, the “teacher” (guru, bLama) plays a central role in cultivating the mind of enlightenment (see Gyatso, 1988; Tsongkhapa, 1999).

At other times, for equally sound pedagogical reasons, the Buddhist path is presented as a spiritual life journey—more natural and developmental, and less formal and institutionalized than suggested by the term “education.” To convey this more natural process, Buddhist training is designated as grounds, paths, and fruits. This reflects the fact that Buddhist enlightenment transforms both the body and the mind through the union of calm abiding and special insight. Calm abiding establishes the physical and mental ground needed to directly experience and embody the path (that is, emptiness); it is a state of one-pointed concentration and attention characterised by both mental and physical pliancy. Special insight, on the other hand, arises when an interested and investigative mind is cultivated as a path within such a calm ground. The investigative path, also known as analytical meditation, gives rise to questions concerning the nature of experience itself. These questions are like seeds in the path that enable the insight of emptiness (and interdependence) to arise, like a plant that inevitably appears when a healthy seed is sown in nutritious soil. The plant is the fruition or embodiment of
when a healthy seed is sown in nutritious soil. The plant is the fruition or embodiment of the path, referred to as liberation. To best include both of these streams—the path as education and the path as spiritual life journey—I conceive of this research as an educational journey.

To render a method of research "Buddhist," or simply compatible with Buddhism here in the West is possible without compromising the fundamentals of either Buddhism or the Western scientific/philosophical perspectives. This is because, in principle, Buddhism does not recognize validation by either textual (that is, scriptural) authority or by divine revelation. Rather, knowledge is something successively validated and then realized through analytical reasoning and direct perception. So, the Buddhist path is not fundamentally in conflict with Western scientific epistemology, the dominant model of Western social research, based as it purportedly is on reason and empiricism combined; there are, however, differences that merit the articulation of a distinctive "Buddhist" research path.

For a path to be compatible with Buddhism does not require that it be labelled so. Instead, a Buddhist path is any teaching featuring the following three characteristics: "1) a teacher who has extinguished all faults and completed her or his good qualities; 2) teachings not harmful to any sentient being; and 3) the view that the self is empty of being permanent, partless, and independent" (Sopa, 1976, p. 54-55). The "good qualities" alluded to are the six virtues or "perfections" (paramitas) in particular—generosity, moral discipline, patience, perseverance, concentration, and wisdom. As for the last two points, I will attempt to articulate Buddhist principles of harmlessness and selflessness that can be adapted and applied within the context of social scientific
research. To map such a path, I borrow from the threefold division of Buddhism into grounds, paths; and fruits to frame the intentions, methods and outcomes of research.

II. Grounds:

The grounds of social research are the intentions and bases on which it is conducted. These include considerations of ethics, intentions, and epistemology to address why certain methods (path, or how) and contents (fruits, or what outcomes) are adopted. I include a rather lengthy comparison of Buddhist and Western Enlightenment epistemologies to provide the grounds to address why such a method and research topic are unique and beneficial for a contemporary, secular Western constituency.

A. Ethics:

Suffering is the ground on which Buddhism is founded. This is articulated in the historical Buddha’s first teaching, the Four Noble Truths, in which he identified the following four fundamental tenets of his path: 1) suffering pervades existence; 2) suffering is caused; 3) as it is caused, so it can cease, and 4) the path to such cessation.

The term suffering is translated from the Sanskrit term dukkha, which connotes a state of dissatisfaction or struggle rather than pain per se. Accordingly, Buddhism recognizes as suffering states not characterized as such in the conventional use of the term. More subtle states of dissatisfaction-as-suffering tend not to be recognized as suffering, and so require an open, honest and mindful attention to be discerned. Then, once suffering and its causes are recognized and acknowledged, one requires motivation to be free of their influence. This requires the confidence that such suffering can cease and that a path
exists to do so. This confidence is most firmly established through personal, direct experience, but is initiated or enhanced through encounters with others who embody such liberation from suffering in their own lives—that is, the Sangha as teachers and students.

Another, albeit more disputed, ground of Buddhism is the notion of *karma*—that is, the “theory” that experiences arise as an effect of previous action, speech and thought.\(^4\) Buddhist ethics and moral discipline are framed by an understanding of *karma*—that is, by the understanding that unwholesome actions of body, speech, and mind bring unwholesome effects, rather than on fear of punishment by a creator-god. Fundamental to Buddhist ethics is to avoid harming sentient beings. For activities of the body, this means not killing, stealing, or perpetrating sexual misconduct. For activities of speech it means not lying, gossiping, chattering, or creating division in the community. For activities of the mind it means not acting on the basis of greed, ill-will, or wrong views. More generally, Buddhist ethics calls for mindfulness rather than obedience to guide one’s actions, making possible the Mahayana Buddhist ethic, which can be simplified in the axiom: “Do good, and if you can’t do good, at least don’t do harm.”

Buddhist ethics begin in a series of vows called Pratimoksa or Individual Liberation vows. They are most elaborately represented in monastic vows, but have simplified lay versions as well. These are directed at moral behaviour, but are designed to encourage an attitude of renunciation. Renunciation is an important state of mind or intention in the Buddhist path, wherein one turns away from ego-driven, worldly motivations for fame, success, wealth, prestige and even for high rebirth, which is not necessarily ego-driven, towards an *unworldly* motivation for liberation from suffering. It is *unworldly* with respect to socially-established values, motivations, and decision-
making criteria that emphasize self-protection, political strategizing, competition, success, and ego-aggrandizement. The Mahayana turn in Buddhism came with the idea that the desire for liberation be extended from personal liberation to include all sentient beings. The cultivation of such universal responsibility, enacted through a path of compassion entailing six virtues or perfections, characterizes the Mahayana intention underlying Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. The Tantric turn contributed the notion that, by means of its unique meditations, such a compassionate enlightenment could be accomplished in one rather than innumerable lifetimes. In this respect, ethics and intention are closely interwoven, but it is the intent and effects of actions that create the karma, rather than the act per se; there are no actions that are inherently right or wrong.

B. Intention:

Accordingly, in Buddhism the quality of one’s intentions are considered to have a profound impact on the course and effects of one’s actions. It is similarly important to clarify intentions in research. In attempting to articulate a Buddhist-based mindfulness inquiry in social research, Bentz and Shapiro (1998) identify the intention to learn as the first principle. By intending to learn, one opens to conversations and experiences of insight and growth. One doesn’t begin by intending to get a doctorate or degree or job, but to learn. Furthermore, “to intend to learn” requires intending to stay interested and engaged in whatever arises, without discrimination or preferences. Mindfulness and equanimity, even love, quite naturally accompany such an intention (Namgyal Rinpoche, 1992).
When interest is turned on the suffering of sentient beings, it becomes compassion, and when efforts are made to universalize such compassion, it becomes the intention cultivated in Mahayana schools of Buddhism like Tibet’s. Compassion is associated with perfectionist schools of ethics (Yearley in Goleman, 1997). Indeed, the foundation of Mahayana ethics are referred to as the six perfections: generosity, morality, patience, energy (persistence), concentration, and wisdom. Yearley points to the perception of a tension or conflict in certain streams of Western philosophy since the Enlightenment between a compassion-based ethics of virtue and one based on rationalized universal rights. He summarizes four principal criticisms of compassion-based ethics: 1) the idea of universal rights are required to safeguard against injustices that compassion-based ethical systems may tolerate; 2) compassionate feelings are elitist and stable in very few save an elect; 3) compassion functions on a person-to-person level and cannot generate general guidelines to run a just society; and 4) compassion produces paternalism, or at least problematic hierarchies, between the compassionate and their objects (p. 15-16). I will take up each of these arguments in succession.

The notion that a society or individual chooses between an ethic of universal rights or an ethic of compassion to guide their actions, as if the two were somehow in conflict, sets up a false dichotomy between questions of justice (that is, rights) and compassion. This supposition appears to be based on an underlying separation between reason (mind) and feelings (body). In the Buddhist view, all sentient beings are understood to share a common desire for happiness. As the Dalai Lama (in Goleman, 1997) explains, this is the nature of sentient life, and our “equal rights” can be founded on this desire to be happy and free of suffering. Such rights, in turn, become the basis for articulating and
understanding a sense of universal responsibility to bring this common desire into fruition. So, the Mahayana articulation of Buddhism combines this sense of universal rights with a sense of universal responsibility:

...[a] person wants happiness just like myself and has every right to be happy and to overcome suffering just like myself, whether that person is close to me or not. So long as they are a sentient being, particularly a human being with similar desires and rights, on that basis I develop compassion. That type of compassion is based on the equality of self and others. There’s no room there for feeling superior. So actually first you realize that others have rights, and on that basis you develop the sense of concern and responsibility.

(p. 22-23)

As for the argument that compassion is somehow accessible to only a few, a sublime and rarefied virtue experienced by a spiritual or feeling elite, according to Buddhism, compassion does not arise as a particular personality trait or as a quality of grace. Instead, it is paradoxically both pervasive in nature yet capable of being perfected (that is, learned). A Chenreisig meditation, for instance, refers to compassion as a natural and omnipresent phenomenon, pervading the depths of samsara (i.e. the suffering and struggles of existence). Yet, at the same time, Buddhism offers systematic methods to cultivate compassion through analytical and meditative practices like The Four Brahma Viharas (The Four Immeasurables in Tibetan Buddhism):

1) loving-kindness (wishing all beings happiness)
2) compassion (wishing all beings free of suffering)
3) sympathetic joy (rejoicing in the happiness of others), and,
4) equanimity (equal feelings for all sentient beings).
As for the third argument, that compassion arises in person-to-person exchanges and cannot serve as the basis for running a just society, as the previous quote by HH the Dalai Lama indicates, an ethic of universal compassion is in fact compatible with an ethic of universal rights. In this sense, compassion is understood as the universal responsibility to act on the basis of the interests of all sentient beings, as if the wellbeing of every sentient being, including myself, were of equal concern. It is accomplished through cultivating equanimity towards all beings by such methods as analysing the ways in which one’s enemy is like a friend or strangers might once have been one’s mothers. Indeed, compassion offers a much-needed complement to rights-based ethics by cultivating a sense of universal responsibility to balance the sense of universal rights. It is a hybrid feeling-insight that arises in part through means of reason—that is, analytical reflection.

The final criticism concerns the purported paternalism of compassion, which is based on the erroneous understanding of compassion as pity or charity directed towards others as somehow separate from oneself. In Buddhism, compassion does not involve pity, nor is it restricted to charity in the conventional sense of the term. Charity and pity are responses to a particular form of suffering, that being the suffering of pain, whereas Buddhism acknowledges two other forms of suffering—the suffering of change and the suffering of suffering (or all-pervasive suffering). The suffering of change is the suffering that comes with the knowledge that even the greatest pleasures are impermanent and unstable. The suffering of suffering is endemic to all beings who inhabit a sentient body, as in the dissatisfaction that leads us to shift our position or take in another breath. In acknowledging the near-universal scope of suffering, and the universal desire to be
free of such suffering, the Buddhist view of compassion offers a way to reduce and eventually to eliminate the sense of separation between ourselves and those perceived to be in need of assistance. This appears in Santideva’s *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* (1979) in the pledge to assume responsibility for the suffering of every last sentient being: “For as long as space endures / And for as long as living beings remain / Until then may I too abide / To dispel the misery of the world” (p. 193).

In Buddhism there is less of a separation between the mind (rational and otherwise) and “the heart,” the literal site wherein compassion and wisdom are said ultimately to be reconciled. Accordingly, I place compassion rather than critical reasoning or social criticism *per se* at the heart of my research because it offers the greatest promise for a way to integrate research as reason (establishing what is “right”) with responsibilities (as embodied experiences and activities of care). Compassion offers a living-centred rather information- or theory-centred research ethic. As disembodied abstract criticism, research becomes prone to inflicting harm under the guise of objective, intellectual freedom. This doesn’t mean there is not a place for righteous indignation, a point HH the Dalai Lama (for example, Gyatso, 1996, p. 179) has repeatedly reiterated. In the face of conflict, compassion is part of any meaningful social justice and vice-versa. As Carter Heyward (1984) argues:

Love, like truth and beauty, is concrete. Love is not fundamentally a sweet feeling; not, at heart, a matter of sentiment, attachment, or being ‘drawn toward.’ Love is active, effective, a matter of making reciprocal and mutually beneficial relation with one’s friends and enemies. Love creates righteousness, or justice, here on earth. To make love is to make justice.
Even post-structuralist philosophers like Foucault (1965, 1984) or Derrida (1982, 1985, 1992), while critiquing the notion of a rational, monolithic truth, still write and present their ideas in the highly arcane and abstract language of a disembodied rationalism with little attention paid to feelings and issues of love and compassion (see Loy, 1992). Compassion provides an important intention and centre to the research process as a means to bring the more disembodied philosophical enterprise of scholarly inquiry into an embodied realization of our ecological embeddedness and interdependence, and hence of our true indebtedness to all life. As poet and ecologist Gary Snyder (1998) suggests, it is a quality capable of transforming the hyper analytical project of rational post-structuralism (and the Derridean process of analytical "deconstruction") into a path closely aligned with Buddhism:

...Deconstruction, done with a compassionate heart and the intention of gaining wisdom, becomes the Mahayana Buddhist logical and philosophical exercise, which plumbs to the bottom of deconstructing and comes back with compassion for all beings. Deconstruction without compassion is self-aggrandisement.

C. Epistemology:

Epistemology, how we establish “the true,” is learned through patterns of trust with respect to conceptual assertions about the world. In this respect, trust is not just a factor of feeling, but influences our approach to knowledge and experience. Just as it is a ground of ethics and intention, trust is an epistemic ground that affects the choices and knowledge we use to construct our research, world, and life.
1. A question of trust:

Trust. The question of trust underlies all epistemological and methodological concerns. What will serve as the basis of our trust? Do we trust what others tell us about our world? Do we trust our own powers of reason? Do we trust our own experience? When in conflict, which do we trust more? It seems necessarily the case that we learn what we live, but do we trust such learning, or do we instead look elsewhere, to authorities to tell us what our own direct experience cannot or what we are unable to trust of it? Of course, the imperative of being alive will reassert itself in the end, for there is no actual path made by planning, reasoning, and strategizing, only by walking the contours of experience. Do we trust our life to make such a path by walking?

2. Enlightenment epistemologies:

Thurman (1984) identifies the acceptance of diverse and multiple “age-old tradition(s) of originality,” the enlightenment traditions that have flourished in all cultures” as an asset, if not precondition, to any meaningful intercivilization dialogue (p. 8). Creative, open dialogue between the various enlightenment traditions offers the greatest promise for tempering the deleterious effects of more culturally invasive processes of modernization—the effects of the Western Enlightenment tradition moving with capitalism into a global arena. It is a question of adapting change to suit living beings and their worlds rather than rejecting modernization per se, which seems unfeasible. As the Confucian scholar Tu (1998) suggests:

The possibility of a radically different ethic or a new value system separate from and independent of the Enlightenment mentality is neither realistic nor authentic. It may even appear to be either cynical or hypercritical. We need to explore the
spiritual resources that may help us to broaden the scope of the Enlightenment project, deepen its moral sensitivity, and, if necessary, transform creatively its genetic constraints in order to realize fully its potential as a worldview for the human condition as a whole. (p. 5)

Buddhism and the Western Enlightenment tradition have sufficiently similar underlying epistemic assumptions to permit creative dialogue between them. For instance, Buddhism shares with the Western scientific tradition, one significant offspring of the Western enlightenment, a cause-and-effect explanation of phenomena, free of any reference to an intervening Creator-God. Yet, rather than a materialist causality, the Buddhists propose a central role for consciousness, for which they have a nuanced and complex understanding. Suffice to say that consciousness is considerably more than intentional thought, as reflected in the opening lines of one of the earliest of Buddhist texts, the Dhammapada: “All is generated from mind—great mind, creative mind.”

In Buddhism, it is understood that our world is constructed through an interdependent relation between mind and matter that does not privilege either side. Valid phenomena (that is, phenomena established on the basis of a correct inference or direct experience) cannot be said to arise exclusively from consciousness or matter, nor from both or neither, but from the complex, interdependent relations between the two. The doctrine of karma (literally, activity) suggests a causal relationship between mind and matter, such that what we think, both individually and collectively, impacts on our experiences in the material world. All experiences have latent or direct causes based in the mind, as well as present supporting circumstances that arise in material phenomena as well. Karma is considered to be in a class of “extremely hidden phenomena” that make it
very difficult to understand completely through either analysis or direct experience. A complete understanding of karma is one of the fruits of the full realization of the human potential as a Buddha.

In addition to this assumption of, or trust in, causality, there are other characteristics Buddhism shares with the Enlightenment. These include an emphasis on: 1) universal principles; 2) reasoned argumentation; 3) open debate; 3) access to education; and, 4) a systematic path to freedom. These overlapping characteristics constitute adequate grounds to make feasible the notion of a hybrid path—a Buddhist-inspired social research method. To do so, I will first attempt a comparison of the epistemological grounds of Western and Buddhist educational traditions.

**a) Western enlightenment epistemology:**

It is worthwhile pointing out that as Western scholars we enter any meaningful intercivilization dialogue with a consciousness imbued in perceptions and worldviews conditioned by Eurocentric and North American modernity (for example, individualism, progress, and mechanized time). Recognizing this bias challenges us to scrutinize the way we understand and represent differences between traditions of historical experience as they interact with forces of modernization. As Eisendstadt and Schluchter query:

If there are multiple modernities, then the question arises: To what extent have they been shaped by the historical experience of their respective societies? The very posing of this question invites another: Are the concepts developed in Western social science, and above all in the social-scientific literature on modernity and modernization, adequate for the analysis of these historical experiences?  

(p. 5-6)
This question led me to articulate and enact a form of social scientific inquiry compatible with Buddhist ethics and epistemology. I began with a critical inquiry into the dominant North American paradigm of research. This led me back to the European Enlightenment, and in particular to Germany as the country that focussed most on enlightenment as an epistemological, rational, and moral philosophical project. In the late 18th century, interest in this project sparked a series of published debates that appeared in Germany under the challenge: “What is Enlightenment?” Moses Mendelssohn (1784), an early contributor to the debates, contended that enlightenment, culture, and education formed an interrelated triad that could significantly improve a society’s wellbeing. He defined “enlightenment” as a people’s rationality and “culture” as their aesthetics, social mores and habits. He contended that enlightenment related to culture as theory to practice, and together they influenced the educational system that emerged in their wake. From this perspective, in the case of Europe and North America, [scientific] rationality was its enlightenment and modernity its culture, which combined to influence modern, secular education. The other respondents to the “What is Enlightenment” debate, both critical and supportive of the Enlightenment, seemed to concur with this understanding of enlightenment as reason.

Immanuel Kant was the respondent most renowned to posterity, and I will use his views as a window into the Enlightenment. I do so in part because his was an attempt to moderate the extremes of science and safeguard a role for morality and religion in the Enlightenment. He was a moderate in this respect, but a highly influential one as well. His views can be taken as both emblematic and formative of the epistemic traditions that have emerged in the wake of the European Enlightenment. For Kant (1784/1996),
enlightened reason was not abstract but rather practical. His justification for the supremacy of practical reason was premised on its ability to generate: 1) autonomy (through epistemology and politics); 2) categorical imperatives (through ethics); and 3) intelligible knowledge of the world that is not directly apparent in the sensible (that is, sensory) world (through scientific and philosophical reflection). According to Kant, “Enlightenment is mankind’s exit from self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to make use of one’s own understanding without the guidance of another” (p. 58). A few years later, Kant expressed this more directly, “Liberation from superstition is enlightenment” (in Bittner, 1996, p. 351). Superstitions, as he understood them, are fuelled by fear, and reason offers the most effective method for eliminating such fears. Kant’s vindication of reason is made on the premise that it is the most effective means of eliminating superstitious and authoritarian tendencies in both societies and individuals through the cultivation of autonomy. Accordingly, Kant identifies reliance on authorities as the antithesis of enlightenment, while reason was self-monitoring and therefore offered its own authority.

Kant assumed a sceptical position with respect to direct experience, which he understood to manifest in three ways: 1) in sensory experience; 2) in the imagination; and, 3) in apperception. In spite of his endorsement of the “plain of experience” as the basis of practical reason, Kant contended that reason based on empirical principles (that is, direct perception) was “degrading” because it encouraged sensuous inclinations. Though less convinced of the detrimental moral effects of the imagination turned on super-sensorial objects such as visions and God, he concluded that the moral applications of such mystical “enthusiasm,” a hybrid of intuition and feeling, was accessible only to
an elite and so was ultimately insufficient for the moral wellbeing of the collective.\textsuperscript{17} Kant identified subjective and personal experience as unreliable and even pathological, which, epitomized in the \textit{dream}, was to be distinguished from the objective, public experience of empiricism. Kant went so far as to suggest that subjective experiences associated with mysticism be perceived as an \textit{illness} of the mind. In his extensive critique of the then-popular spiritual mystic Swedenborg,\textsuperscript{18} Kant concluded that this spirit-seer suffered “a real illness” and was a “candidate for the mental hospital” (Bohme & Bohme, 1982/1996, p. 444).

Kant’s turn against metaphysics and mysticism constituted \textit{the critical turn},\textsuperscript{19} which was founded on sceptically delimiting, disciplining, and pathologizing all but the most objective and publicly verifiable experiences. These “practical” experiences circumscribed the limits of what he called “practical” reason. What is deemed objective in the sense of empirical by Kant is not something that is simply experienced directly by the senses, but something that is capable of being \textit{publicly} validated. For Kant, human beings live in two worlds—“the sensible world...under laws of nature” and “the intelligible world...under laws which ...have their ground in reason alone.” (O’Neill, 1989, p. 67). The intelligible world is not a metaphysical, transcendent realm, but rather one derived from the sensible world; it is constituted of formal principles on which the sensible world appears to function. In spite of a tacit acknowledgement of the legitimacy of both, Kant emphasized the role of the \textit{intelligible} domain of conceptual, analytical abstractions over the \textit{sensible} domain of non-conceptual, direct perceptions. Knowledge was, for Kant, a process of progressive abstraction from the basis of the sensible world...
but ending, quite consistently, in the abstract, intelligible world of concepts and principles.

For Kant, what lay beyond the limits of a constraining reason was an ominous, abjected state we “have no option save to abandon.” His cosmology was constructed instead on the basis of a domesticated “plain of experience” delineated by practical reason, which in turn was constrained and defined on the basis of pure reason. What lay beyond the purview of that “plain of experience,” was denigrated publicly by Kant as tantamount to mental illness. What was unknown or not understood, and what defied the existing abilities of human beings to define, measure and represent, became pathologized as it was once divinized/demonized, rather than remaining open to speculative inquiry as phenomena yet to be understood. While Kant contributed to this pathologizing of the imagination, in his more personal writings he betrayed considerable doubts and uncertainties, as in the following section of a letter to Mendelssohn. In this letter, he considers the feasibility of the claims of his nemesis, Swedenborg: “Also with regard to the spirit reports, I cannot restrain myself from a small attachment to these sorts of stories, nor can I help nourishing some suspicion of the correctness of their rational basis” (Bohme & Bohme, 1983/1996, p. 443).

What is perhaps most interesting is that in public Kant condemned venomously what in private he openly considered and even held in credulity. Such discrepancies between his public and personal points of view, which some might call hypocrisy, are consistent with his tendency to demarcate the public and personal domains. For instance, his defense of autonomy was made on behalf of the public domain, which for him meant public intellectual exchanges, and not the personal domain where one executed one’s
official office and role with respect to family, community and state. This finds parallel articulation in a work Kant (1960) published entitled Pedagogik or Education, in which he describes the importance of the “art of dissimulation” and the “art of disclosure” in the education of children. In explaining these arts, he posits that for a child to learn discretion, one of three principles of “practical education” alongside skills and morality, the child must:

...acquire prudence, he must learn to disguise his feelings and to be reserved, while at the same time he learns to read the character of others. It is chiefly with regard to his own character that he must cultivate reserve. ...For this end a kind of dissembling is necessary; that is to say, we have to hide our faults and keep up that outward appearance. This is not necessarily deceit, and is sometimes allowable, although it does border closely on insincerity. (p. 96)

Here Kant betrays what appears to border on a repressive view of personal experience, which runs throughout his work. In the same text, he argues that children should be discouraged from acting on the basis of feelings but only on a sense of duty, as feelings can turn from positive to negative. Feelings, instead, become aspects of human experience in need of masking, hiding, and being made impenetrable to the public gaze. Yet, this very tendency created conditions in which public (that is, collective) faults were able to persist unchallenged by personal experience, doubts and contradictory feelings. Indeed, aspects of the Enlightenment and its related modernizations have proved in some instances to be as dogmatic as the Church doctrine it was proposed to remedy, and more totalitarian in its political extremes (for example, post-Revolutionary France, Nazi Germany, the USSR, and the PRC). Consider, for example, the dogmatic tendencies in
which scientific knowledge tends to be presented in classrooms and in the public. The principal difference in this respect between dominant Western epistemologies and the Buddhist tradition is that in Buddhism knowledge based on direct, embodied (for example, personal) experience is considered to offer the most trust and confidence.

b) Buddhist epistemology & enlightenment:

Buddhism is grounded in an understanding of enlightenment as first and foremost a process transforming sentient persons rather than abstract publics. In Mahayana Buddhism, the motivation for universal liberation became accentuated, rendering the understanding of enlightenment as not just intrapersonal but also interpersonal, yet still aimed at something natural—tathagatagarbha, the innate mind of enlightenment, translated as Buddha Nature—rather than based on social, institutional or public reform. This emphasis on the liberation of persons, fundamental to Buddhism, is predicated on the view that mind rather than matter is most directly responsible for generating experience. This emphasis on consciousness, in turn, led to an understanding of valid knowledge as predicated on a valid consciousness. A valid consciousness is one that knows its object on the basis of valid direct perception (that is, the real) or valid inference (that is, the true). As such, epistemology (establishing what is true) and ontology (establishing what is real) became interconnected in Buddhism.²⁰

A Buddhist system of epistemology was developed by Dignaga (480-540 CE) and Dharmakirti (600-660 CE)²¹ to defend and differentiate Buddhism from competing Indian traditions, such as Hinduism and Jainism. It established common criteria to conduct conversations across these various religious traditions with terms and forms of discourse to articulate their similarities and differences.²² Buddhism was minimalist in its
acceptance of only two forms of valid knowers or *pramana*—direct perceivers and inferential cognizers. Restricting formal validity to these two appeared sceptical in contrast with the considerably more elaborate forms of valid knowledge advocated by the other schools. The Hindu Vedanta, for instance, identified four other forms of valid knowledge: testimony, analogy, presumption, and non-apprehension. These would not be accepted as valid proofs on the grounds of reasoning established by Dignaga and Dharmakirti, though testimony by one who can be reasoned to be trustworthy is considered acceptable under certain conditions (that is, for knowledge not accessible by reason or direct experience).

Not only were “wrong” perceptions and reasonings rejected as invalid, but so too were poorly developed “convictions” or knowledge heard but not reasoned through sufficiently to constitute a valid inference *for the knower*. Another Indian tradition, the *vyakarana* or philosophy of grammar, shared some classes of valid knowers with Buddhism but differed in the value assigned to each type of validity; so, they held direct perception and reason as the weakest validation and testimony and scripture as the strongest, in ascending order. What is unique about Buddhist epistemology with respect to other formal epistemologies in India and elsewhere is its high valuation of direct perception, which is understood to include direct sensory perception, direct mental perception, and yogic direct perception.

This high valuation of direct experience corresponds with a supposition that whatever can be validly inferred to exist can be validly experienced as existing, and thereby be *realized* in the continuum of one’s embodied experience. Enlightenment is predicated on a special form of direct experience or perception called “yogic direct
perception,“ an experience beyond Kant’s ordinary “plain of experience.” In particular, Buddhist education is interested in the direct experience, that is, insight, of emptiness or what is specifically defined in the Prasangika-Madhyamika school of Tibetan Buddhism as “the lack of inherent existence.” With this special experience (insight, yogic direct perception), a series of effects and actions result which can be said to be the realization of emptiness as interdependence.24 Such a realization is said to transform and liberate the person from states of suffering.

Related yogic direct perceptions include those involving impermanence, suffering, and selflessness, that have varying degrees of “hidden” aspects that are not readily accessible to ordinary sensory direct perception.25 In most cases, these insights can only be experienced directly by first constructing a valid (rational) inference and then meditating upon that inference. Liberation arises from insight into emptiness (that is, the direct experience of the lack of inherent existence), which is generally predicated on first developing a valid inference of emptiness. Kensur Yeshey Tubden (1994) describes this inference in the following terms:

All phenomena are identical in being signless. All lack signs or reasons that would establish them as existing from their own side or, to put this another way, would prove them to inherently exist. Being without inherent existence signifies that things lack their own character in the sense of lacking a nature that exist from its own side. Thus, all phenomena are the same in being characterless; that is, all are empty of having their own inherent nature. (p. 94)

This view finds resonance in the work of Adorno (1966/1973) who also points to the difference between concepts and existence: “No matter how hard we try for linguistic
expression of such a history congealed in things, the words we use will remain concepts. Their precision substitutes for the thing itself, without quite bringing its selfhood to mind; there is a gap between words and the thing they conjure” (p. 52-53). Adorno understood that this experience of a gap between concepts and “a history congealed in things” arises with analytical reflection: “The test of the power of language is that the expression and the thing will separate in reflection. Language becomes a measure of truth only when we are conscious of the non-identity of an expression with that which we mean” (p. 111). So articulated, Adorno’s view on language and reason corresponds closely with the Buddhist view. This condition of recognizing a certain negation implicit in any assertion of truth is an ethical condition insofar as understanding the difference between concepts and direct experience allows us to separate from the deleterious effects of conceptual constructions involving essentialized identities, propaganda, and oppressive cultural practices or institutions. It is, in other words, the basis of freedom—both in the Buddhist sense of liberation and in the Western sense of liberty. Furthermore, like Adorno, Buddhism argues that the role of concepts should be to enhance not negate existence. Although it advocates the negation of inherent existence, it cautions practitioners against negating existence per se. To conceptually negate existence would constitute an error of nihilism, which is far more serious than an error of reification for it tends to lead to the negation of ethics (hence to ethical and karmic degeneration).26

In Buddhism, knowledge derived from valid direct experience is deemed more stable and confident than that derived from valid inferences because one has witnessed the object as directly as possible. In this respect, the most stable ground of knowledge is experience, understood as both sensory and yogic (that is, subtle) direct perception. Yet,
although a direct perception offers more confident knowledge of the thing, an inference (that is, thought consciousness) is nonetheless valuable for its superior ability to ascertain (that is, understand, draw inferences about) that thing, and in particular what is hidden or partially hidden from sensory experience. The classic example of an inference is that which discerns a fire when one sees the sign of smoke, or, to use a modern example, what discerns gravity when an apple falls from a tree. Indeed, reason was affirmed as an important ground of knowledge in the Buddhist educational dating back to the teachings of the historical Buddha himself, who implored his students to test his words against the litmus of their own reason and experience, “as a goldsmith would test a nugget of gold.”

III. Paths:

Paths refer to “method” in traditional research lexicon; more generally, it can be understood to address the question, How? How is the research path learned? How does one seek and validate one’s knowledge? How does one learn, and how does one translate that learning to others? For a research path to be Buddhist, it must include a path of direct realization, so how does make it so?

A. Apprenticing the path:

The field of Buddhist-Christian comparative religion adopted the term “orthopraxis” to describe, “a set of experiences and techniques, conceived as a ‘way’ to be followed, leading one to relive the founder’s path to enlightenment” (Carruthers, 1998, p. 1). It distinguished from “orthodoxy,” which involves learning by explicating canonical texts or creeds. Although the challenge of orthopraxis is to progress from texts
to a lineage of experience, it is difficult if not impossible to transmit such a lineage conceptually, especially if one attempts to do so through orthodox communicative conventions. As a consequence, "instead of normative dogma, [orthopraxis] relies upon patterns of oral formulae and ritualized behavior to prepare for an experience..." (p. 1). Carruthers points out that, while orthopraxis describes a tradition of education in monasteries, it has precedents in the apprenticeship craft traditions:

...Most of this knowledge cannot even be set down in words; it must be learned by practicing, over and over again. Monastic education is best understood, I think, on this apprenticeship model, more like masonry or carpentry than anything in the modern academy. It is an apprenticeship to a craft which is also a way of life. It is 'practice' both in the sense of being 'preparation' for a perfect craft mastery, which can never fully be achieved, and in the sense of 'working' in a particular way. (p. 1–2)

While there are, no doubt, some intact apprenticeship lineages of craft or practice in the academy, from music to medicine and education, for the most part these concern a visible skill and product; how more challenging when the skill and product are the mind and experience itself. To translate such an experiential lineage into the academy is a lofty project indeed, and one I can only envision in optimistic moments. Nonetheless, insofar as there are people doing research who are a part of such an embodied lineage, then perhaps the effects will be felt by whatever name it is given. As HH the Dalai Lama described in oral teachings he gave to Westerners during a large Kalachakra initiation in Sarnath, India:
Whenever Buddhism moves to a new culture, it takes on a new form. Certain fundamental and necessary principles are conserved, but around those develop cultural practices unique to a particular culture and people. Through the act of living in and from your own culture as Buddhists, slowly a path best-suited to you and your culture will emerge.

B. The conceptual/experiential divide:

Translating a lineage of realization or experience into a new culture requires a more subtle appreciation of culture and its effect on thinking and experience than is ordinarily apparent. One has to be an ethnographer regardless of one’s method, because one faces the continuous challenge of writing and translating similarities across cultural differences. Culture involves a web of conceptions about life and experience that affect how we experience the world, rendering the gap between such concepts and experience difficult to discern. Nonetheless, with sufficient analytical reflections and experiences of the world, such a gap can be known. Accordingly, I organized my research study to cultivate such awareness by paying attention to distinctions between reason and direct experience. Since culture and cross-cultural dialogue is so central to this process, I chose an ethnographic format, as a pre-existing Western social research template, to dialogue with a Buddhist method. I have intentionally resisted taking the traditional path of Buddhist studies in the literary and philological tradition because it tends to neglect Buddhism as a living culture and system of education. So, in enacting the path, I attempted to integrate reasoned inferences (from philosophical inquiry) with direct
experience (from “empirical” field observations and direct experiences), and to directly realize and embody those insights.

1. **Reason and direct experience:**

   Scholarly and popular representations of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism in the West have tended to depict it in one of two extremes--either as a dry, rationalist tradition or conversely as an anti-rational undertaking in which reason and language are objects of refutation if not ridicule.\(^{29}\) Part of my motivation in undertaking this study has been to counteract such misrepresentations. As has been mentioned, reason is useful on the path to construct valid inferences about the world, which, in turn, allow more uncommon and inaccessible experiences to be directly known. A valid inference is not a theory so much as knowledge inferred on the basis of reasoning. In science, the force of gravity might offer a suitable example of such a valid inference, whereby an elusive phenomena becomes named, reasoned and inferred as a causal factor in the behaviour of other phenomena. When one investigates gravity sufficiently, it becomes a valid inference, and this allows the direct experience of gravity on one’s own bodily sensations. So, one uses inferential reasoning as an apprentice might use a master’s directions to perfect a craft, or a wanderer might use a guide’s map to arrive at a particular location (that is, experience) in the world. In addition to this role, reason is considered to be the principal means to train the mind away from states of anger and resentment towards states of compassion, which analytical meditation is considered well-suited to cultivate.\(^{30}\)

   There has been a tendency to separate paths of philosophical rationalism (reason) from paths of scientific empiricism (experience). In social scientific theses, for example, conceptual theses are distinguished from empirical studies. A third form of research is
the performative dissertation, hitherto identified with Music and the Fine Arts, wherein a student embodies research in a single performance. Performative research aims at the integration of theory and practice, and the result is judged in part for its ability to do so. These three resemble the threefold division of learning I outlined above into: inference, direct experience, and realization, where the performance is the realization of the other two. I have attempted to integrate these three types of dissertations into one to reflect better the continuum of reason, direct experience, and realization presented in Buddhism. To accomplish this, first I engaged in philosophical and analytical investigations involving hearing (and reading), thinking, and meditating on texts, oral teachings, and conversations. Second, I was mindful of memories and direct experiences relevant to my investigations, which were followed by observations and experiences both in Tibetan communities and in my experiences in the Canadian academy as I struggled to complete a doctorate. Finally, I have attempted to make the research, writing, and presentation of this work performative both in JL Austin’s (1961) sense of a transformative enactment and in Judith Butler’s (1991) post-modern sense of a “playful” performance.

Austin developed an understanding of “the performative” as transformative speech. He wanted to draw attention to forms of speech in which things are not said but done through the utterance of words. (An example is “I do” in a marriage ceremony, where the act of uttering the words changes one’s identity, at least with respect to the state.) Austin restricted his use of the term to ritualistic uses of speech. For a more nuanced sense of the term performative across diverse contexts, I draw on Judith Butler’s explanation of how identities are per/formed through playfully enacting the very thing one is learning (that is, roles, theories, insights). By playfully acting out what it is one is
learning, knowledge transforms into embodied experience as we learn to live in the world differently. In this respect, trying to be an embodied researcher is comparable to Butler's (1991) description of learning gender—that is, we become what we play at being (p. 18):

To say that I play at being one is not to say that I am not one “really”; rather, how and where I play at being one is the way in which that “being” gets established, instituted, circulated, and confirmed. This is not a performance from which I take radical distance, for this is deep-seated play, psychically entrenched play.

2. **Realization and embodiment:**

Transformation involves the direct realization of knowledge, which in Buddhism arises as the fruit of a variety of analytical and mindfulness meditative practices. In other words, it is a quality of embodied knowing that follows analytical and experiential reflections. It may begin intentionally as in *praxis*, which is also predicated on reflective experience, but to embody or realize knowledge is more spontaneous and integrated with one’s way in the world than conveyed by the term praxis. The direct realization of knowledge has ordinary and more esoteric manifestations. For instance, I might develop a conceptual inference that exercise develops muscles, and even corroborate such an inference with observations of the musculature of athletes and how their muscles change over time. Yet, when I adopt an exercise regime that leads me to directly experience a change in my own metabolism and musculature, then such knowledge can be said to be directly realized. The knowledge accompanies a transformation, which alters the way I act both intentionally and unintentionally. This knowledge may be said to have influenced my lifestyle and interactions with the world. Not only does the idea of realization suggest a more confident and stable knowledge than when the knowledge is
treated exclusively as an "objective" fact, but so too does it involve a deeper significance when understood as the embodiment and transformation of action.

For more subtle realizations, let us consider the case of emptiness. A significant component of this insight is the recognition that things do not exist under investigation as they appear to exist in ordinary, unreflective experience. This is an important insight when encountering obstacles to the fulfilment of our happiness. With the direct experience of emptiness, one recognizes that the world arises as a projection, which an untrained awareness sees as more solid and fixed than is the case. With this realization, we learn to respond to obstacles with creativity, understanding that they are less fixed and more mutable than they may appear. Seeing that we impute much of the sense of concreteness onto our experience, we find it easier to recognize the fluidity of such experience and its ability to change. Once realized, this allows us to live a more creative life that is able to accord better with our hopes, aspirations, and happiness.

Just as the concept orthopraxis facilitated scholarly comparisons and dialogues between Buddhism and Christianity, similarly, the concept of embodiment and enactivism have gained currency in cognitive science in the attempt to compare and integrate Buddhist and scientific conceptions of identity, mind, and knowing. To do so, cognitive theorists like Varela et. al. (1991) "propose a constructive task: to enlarge the horizon of cognitive science to include the broader panorama of human, lived experience in a disciplined, transformative analysis" (p. 14). Recognizing the limitations of the scientific tendency to treat the mind exclusively from its objective bases in the brain, these scientific theorists have argued for an experiential appreciation of mind to complement such objective understanding. "We believe that if cognitive science is to include human
experience, it must have some method for exploring and knowing what human experience is” (p. 23). Phenomenology initiated just such a project to articulate a science of the mind and experience, but restricted itself to rational, theoretical reflection. Instead, these authors ask, “Where can we turn for a tradition that can provide an examination of human experience in both its reflective and its immediate, lived aspects?” (p. 21):

What we are suggesting is a change in the nature of reflection from an abstract, disembodied activity to an embodied (mindful), open-ended reflection. By *embodied*, we mean reflection in which body and mind have been brought together. What this formulation intends to convey is that reflection is not just *on* experience, but reflection *is* a form of experience itself—and that reflective form of experience can be performed with mindfulness/awareness. (p. 27)

C. Mindfulness:

It is in Buddhism that Varela et. al. (1991) locate just such a tradition of mindfulness as embodied, open-ended reflection: “Mindfulness means that the mind is present in embodied everyday experience; mindfulness techniques are designed to lead the mind back from its theories and preoccupations, back from the abstract attitude, to the situation of one’s experience itself” (p. 22). Mindfulness arises by attending to what was previously ignored, by “letting go of habits of mindlessness, as an *un*learning rather than a learning. …When the mindfulness meditator finally begins to let go rather than to struggle to achieve some particular state of activity, then body and mind are found to be naturally co-ordinated and embodied” (p. 29). For example, in our search for wellbeing and happiness, we may find ourselves passing through illness and grief; part of the
healing of those states requires that we first know the nature and cause of their suffering, which requires a bare, non-discriminating attention. This state becomes the condition for the emergence of wisdom-realizing-emptiness, which, when conjoined with a compassionate motive to do so for the sake of all sentient beings, generates (the Mahayana) enlightenment. Such compassion arises as spontaneous ethical action within the complexity of situated experience: “Another characteristic of the spontaneous compassion that does not arise out of the volitional action of habitual patterns is that it follows no rules. It is not derived from an axiomatic ethical system nor even from pragmatic moral injunctions. It is completely responsive to the needs of the particular situation” (p. 250).

Langer (1997) identifies various qualities that cultivate and maintain mindfulness. She calls this “sideways learning” to distinguish it from either top-down or bottom-up models of research and education, characterized by “an openness to novelty and actively noticing differences, contexts and perspectives” that make us receptive to an ongoing situation. Mindfulness, according to Langer, has five qualities: 1) openness to novelty; 2) alertness to distinction; 3) sensitivity to different contexts; 4) implicit, if not explicit, awareness of multiple perspective; and 5) orientation in the present” (p. 23). Mindfulness training is characterized by a loose, soft “vigilance,” wherein one attends without interrupting or controlling the chain of bodymind experiences. Although there are multiple and highly specialised ways to cultivate mindfulness, one way to practice in the context of naturalistic research is to continually pose the question, “What is it I am not seeing or noticing?” When we are mindless, we tend to perpetuate incomplete rationalised stories about “reality” based on the indoctrination of our culture and
upbringing by ignoring what is appearing before us rather than by attending to the complexity of a present (objective) circumstance.

IV. Fruits:

In social research, it is helpful to understand and articulate the outcomes or fruits towards which a research path is framed. Is it for information, for wisdom, or for wellbeing, and if so, for whom? How is the research process related to those desired ends? Although research should envisage no pre-determined outcomes, a researcher may hope for results of a certain kind. In the Buddhist path, this is accomplished through a discussion of fruits or fruition, wherein the desired effect of the path is “enlightenment” and the various qualities associated with such a state. Though not explicit, the standard outcome of social research could be described as “practical reason,” enlightenment as it was understood in the Western European tradition. Conversely, in attempting to translate fruits as understood in the Buddhist path, I have identified wellbeing, the realization of interdependence, and compassion and wisdom as important elements.

A. Wellbeing:

The most meaningful sense of “knowing” in Buddhism suggests that to know is to heal. Accordingly, this is the basic tenet of the research path I here propose. Knowing-as-healing does not arise from information but from focussing quest(ion)s and interest on experience, and particularly on the experience of suffering. This gives knowledge an ethical depth, making it accountable to a fundamental desire for happiness and freedom from suffering, which Buddhism claims is intrinsic to sentient existence. Theodor
Adorno (1966/1973) suggests “the need to let suffering speak is the condition of all truth” (in Cornell, 1992, p. 13). He argues that the “unity” that is the outcome of the dialectic of the Kantian Enlightenment is in fact the repression of the natural (sensate) world by the rational (intelligible). Accordingly, the Enlightenment dialectic bears a nihilistic seed in which existence suffers under the attack of reason. In the process, suffering tends to be denied, and with it the values of wellness and happiness that are predicated on first recognizing and acknowledging suffering. For Adorno, the route to salvaging that existence is, in part, through affirming the philosophical concept of existence. “What is true in the concept of existence is the protest against a condition of society and scientific thought that would expel unregimented experience—a condition that would virtually expel the subject as a moment of cognition” (p. 123). By “unregimented experience,” I understand Adorno to refer to a form of direct experience unconditioned or minimally conditioned by socialization and culture. In seeking a form of knowing that brings wellness and happiness, I am seeking a research program that allows the rational and natural, the rational and more experiential, to co-exist and interact without undermining and eliminating their difference and respective value.

The idea of knowing as healing finds a distant cousin in the Greek, proto-scientific thinker Epicurus (341 BC – 271 BC) who contended that "empty is the argument of the philosopher by which no human disease is healed. For just as there is no benefit in medicine if it does not drive out bodily disease, so there is no benefit in philosophy if it does not drive out the disease of the soul." In Buddhism, such diseases of the soul are understood to be caused by the mind—specifically, by greed, hatred, and, most fundamentally, ignorance. This view compels students to move beyond intellectual
inquiry to embrace the question and experience of suffering and its cessation in their lives and those of others. Similarly, I wish to articulate a path of social research capable of negotiating the gap between reason and experience. It is out of this gap, I contend, that existence, the natural or the real is capable of being intuited, if not directly known and communicated, in a manner that can render such research as a healing.

As a healing educational journey, the Buddhist path does not attend to isolated intellectual or discursive “facts” or practices but to the deep existential interests of living beings. In the case of human beings, our health is determined by our actions of body, speech, mind, and circumstances, which are themselves influenced by our explanations and worldviews. Accordingly, the health of activities, places, circumstances and views become relevant—whether they are “wholesome” sources of integrity (from the root whole) and wellbeing.34 This requires understanding the mechanics and experiences of suffering, the causes of such suffering, and ways to eliminate those causes. One of the oldest Buddhist texts, the Pali Abhidhamma called the Dhammasangam, identifies mental health or wellness not just as a fruit, but as a starting point of the meditative path: “When a healthy conscious attitude, belonging to the world of sensual relatedness, accompanied by and permeated with serenity, and associated and linked up with knowledge, has arisen...,” then we meditate.35 If we break these ideas down into distinct qualities of wellbeing, they would include: 1) health; 2) mindfulness; 3) groundedness; 4) related and interdependent; 4) calm and serene; and finally, 5) knowing.

I use the term wellbeing to distinguish the Buddhist conception of satisfaction from wellness, a term derived from Aristotle’s eudemonia, literally “having a good guardian spirit,” (Honderich, p. 252).36 The Buddhist sense of wellbeing derives from an
integrated subjective/objective understanding of satisfaction, but privileges the subjective insofar as the ability to experience happiness is more important than the presence or absence of any specific objective circumstance or condition. Such wellbeing from knowledge is connected to what Adorno (1966/1973) calls a *philosophical experience*:

In sharp contrast to the usual ideal of science, the objectivity of dialectical cognitions needs not less subjectivity, but more. Philosophical experience withers otherwise. But our positivistic *zeitgeist* is allergic to this need. It holds that not all men are capable of such experience; that it is the prerogative of individuals destined for it by their dispositions and life story; that calling for it as a premise of cognition is elitist and undemocratic. (p. 40).

In Buddhism, wellbeing is achieved through enlightening as a verb, which is the process of cultivating seven factors—mindfulness (*sati*), investigation (*dhamma-vicaya*), energy (*virya*), bliss/joy (*piti*), tranquillity/calm (*passadhi*), concentration /absorption (*samadhi*), and equanimity (*upekkha*), (Namgyal, 1992, p. 91). If one cultivates these qualities during the process of research, as in any activity, then such are the fruits of one’s endeavours; in other words, one becomes what one does. Furthermore, as with Aristotle’s understanding of *eudemonia* or wellness, wellbeing in Buddhism arises from the practice of ethics and virtue. In the modern medical interpretation of health, such a connection has been lost, but in both Hindu and Buddhist thought, wellbeing is understood to arise significantly from ethical action (Krishna, 1998). In Buddhism, the foremost ethic is compassion or love, and so the path to wellbeing includes compassion and love. This is the conclusion of Chilean neurobiologist Humberto Maturana (1998) as well, namely that most if not all healing arises as a response to love. His notion of
wellbeing is of a natural state that arises from living “adequately” within the flow of relations between one’s internal structures and eco-social niche, and it is love that allows the recognition of such adequacy to emerge.

The Western Enlightenment is an important historical milestone for freedom in the world, and part of that can be accounted for by its strong emphasis on rational empiricism over other modes of validation. Yet, it is important not to exaggerate the powers and importance of reason to human wellbeing. The Nazi German state was perhaps the epitome of the rationalized state and it was certainly NOT salvaged from the dark side of human nature. Furthermore, it is crucial to interrupt the false dichotomy perpetuated by the Enlightenment between rationalism/science and irrationalism/religion.

There are aspects of science that are irrational and dogmatic and aspects of religion that are open and rational. Likewise, the Western Enlightenment has idealistic and irrational aspects, as for instance, in the very belief that a rationalized economic or social system could bring utopian progress, as if humans are passive agents whose desires succumb to reason (rather than the other way around, as is often the case). The effectiveness of the Western Enlightenment project depends on its ability to engage with other cultures and histories creatively to amend the views and institutions on which it continues to rest.

It is worthwhile to consider, albeit ambitiously, just how important reason is and has been across diverse cultures and histories in establishing healthy human beings and societies, and then to ask, “What else is and has been important?” If the legacy of the Enlightenment has been to curtail and prevent these other factors from manifesting, then such a legacy is in need of some criticism. I do so myself not to interrupt the role of the rational altogether, but rather to reduce the harmful effects of its suppression of other
aspects of human wellbeing, and to allow these other aspects be voiced, heard, and integrated into our personal and institutional experiences. These aspects include compassion, love, feelings, desire, and intuition. My conclusion, after years of reflections on the subject, is that reason is an insufficient, albeit partial, condition for a well person, a well human life, or a well culture. In part this is precisely because it is connected to other factors, such as underlying feelings and desires, which are too easily obscured or denied in the purportedly rational act.

Reason must be tempered by love, compassion, and an openness towards what eludes rational representation. After all, there is a lot in our experience that does not fit well inside a reasoned argument, but it doesn't mean it doesn't exist. To temper reason with these other qualities in the process of research asks us to attend to qualitative experience and not just to definitions, quantities of objects, or rationalized subjects. This requires yielding to experience, not from a sense of identification with our own subjectivity but with mindful attention, even when the experience defies our ability to represent it meaningfully within a social world. As Adorno (1966/1973) argues, “To yield to the object means to do justice to the object’s qualitative moments. Scientific objectification, in line with the quantifying tendency of all science since Descartes, tends to eliminate qualities and to transform them into measurable definitions.” To know wellbeing requires “yielding” in mindfulness to a qualitative moment, and in so yielding, to realize the interdependent nature of our existence.
B. The realization of emptiness as interdependence:

The principal fruit of the Buddhist path, on which any ultimate wellbeing is predicated, is the realization of emptiness. I say “ultimate” here in the sense of a wellbeing that is not contingent on conditions, which are beyond our control. This realization entails the simultaneous realization of interdependence. Emptiness and interdependence are mutually necessary conditions—that is, emptiness is possible because of interdependence, and interdependence because of emptiness, what Tsongkhapa called “The King of Reasons.” The world of phenomena come into being on the basis of the dialogue between awareness and matter (that is, structure). Accordingly, we cannot posit an existence outside or independence of awareness. This is a view shared by the scientific view of cognition presented by Maturana (1998) and Maturana and Varela (1986). Colour is a classic case in point, which both Maturana and Varela studied at length. We perceive the redness of a poppy as if it were a characteristic of the flower itself, without appreciating that the redness is created through the dialogue between our conditioned senses, perception, and cognition and the wavelength of light reflecting off the surface of the phenomenon. In this, it can be said that the emptiness of the poppy’s redness is its interdependence on its parts (for example, saturation, lightness), causes for (that is, wavelength of light and human senses and perception), and its imputation by a consciousness (labelling as ‘red’ the colour of a poppy.) Hence, its interdependence becomes the basis of its lack of inherent existence.

The way we become aware of such interdependence is through both analysis and a quality of mindful attention. The latter requires a focused attention and interest on immediate experience. Such attention creates the conditions, in turn, for a type of
validity I refer to as "ecological." I label this as a form of validity because it is a sign of the truth value of one's research endeavour. Ecological validity confirms one is "making a path by walking." Such validity arises spontaneously when one no longer needs to exert effort to investigate one's subject by intentionally pursuing research sources or constructing research conditions. It is an effortless activity where one's entire life becomes the answer to one's question, which one "suffers" until such insight arises. Accordingly, one's life becomes one's research. Such ecological validity is possible because of our interdependence in the web of life. It involves accepting knowledge as a gift of both experience and the world, and then offering one's re/search back as a gift, in turn. Helen Norberg-Hodge (1997) describes this Buddhist understanding of interdependence in the words of the foremost Ladakhi Buddhist scholar, Tashi Rabgyas:

Take any object, like a tree. When you think of a tree, you tend to think of it as a distinct, clearly defined object, and on a certain level it is. But on a more important level, the tree has no independent existence; rather, it dissolves into a web of relationships. The rain that falls on its leaves, the wind that causes it to sway, the soil that supports it—all form a part of the tree. Everything in the universe helps make the tree what it is. It cannot be isolated, its nature changes from moment to moment—it is never the same. This is what we mean when we say that things are 'empty,' that they have no independent existence. (p. 80)

C. Compassion and wisdom:

Compassion and wisdom, and their embodied manifestation in a person—that is, in a Bodhisattva or Buddha—are the fruits of the Mahayana Buddhist path, where compassion
is said to be necessary in the beginning (intention); middle (path); and end (fruit) of the path. The particular wisdom of note in Buddhism is the wisdom realizing emptiness and interdependence. When this wisdom arises as the experience of a valid direct (yogic) perception, it liberates the consciousness from at least some degree of struggle (that is, suffering). Where one once believed in the superiority of one’s worth over that of others, for instance, one comes to recognize one’s own place in relationship and can respond with the larger interest in mind. One can turn away from volatile or damaging encounters, which one might otherwise have grasped onto in habitual mind-states of greed or hatred. This creativity is what is meant by liberation or freedom in Buddhism, and it is the standard fruit by which all knowledge and paths are judged. Again we find an echo in Adorno (1974), who enjoins us to “regard all things as they present themselves from the standpoint of redemption” (p. 247). Bentz and Shapiro (1998) explain:

By redemption he means whatever historical, social, or political process would eliminate the domination and exploitation that keeps things from being in accord with their potential and thereby would “free” people and things to be what they truly are. The inquirer is reminded to see things in terms of their potential and of their undeformed, undistorted nature. The standpoint of redemption is something that one can adopt deliberately in inquiry, in order to see this nature. (p. 166-167)

V. Conclusion:

What Buddhism asks of learners is not simply an immersion in experience, but the transformation of experience through reflection and mindfulness. The Indo-Tibetan Buddhist view is predicated on a radical affirmation of the power of rational analysis to
reveal the nature of any phenomenon. Without such reasoned analysis, ordinary experience is deceptive. It has an illusory element that is the product of habits that arise from our personal and collective conditioning, including the very structure of our nervous system and senses. We habitually experience whatever we have been conditioned to experience in order to survive, but it erroneously appears to us that we are experiencing a world “out there.”

Conversely, there are qualitative experiences that are not part of our conditioned habits that are only accessible through first engaging in analytical reflection. Just because they aren’t accessible to ordinary experience doesn’t mean they don’t exist, anymore than the invisibility of gravity or infrared light suggests it does not exist. On the basis of a valid inference, however, one can directly know subtle, liberating experiences such as emptiness through a direct *yogic* perception that forever alters the way one understands, experiences, and abides (is embodied) in the world. The end is experience, but not ordinary experience; it is a quality of experience transformed through reflection and realization.

Although my treatment of research principles has been more theoretical than practical, the remaining chapters convey how these principles became embodied in the process of my research into Indo-Tibetan Buddhist education. It is hoped that the reader has so far gleaned a sense of the particular conception of reason and direct experience presented in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist epistemology. Now, I wish to explore whether and how this view is translated into practice in the lived experience of the students of Dolma Ling Nunnery and Institute of Dialectics. In the Indo-Tibetan monastic tradition, the education of reason takes place within a very complex system of dialectic debate that is
radically different from any practice I am aware of in the world. Even the use of the term “debate,” as we will learn, is, shall we say, debatable in this case. So, I invite you to “intend to learn,” as we continue our educational journey into the debate courtyards of Dolma Ling, situated in the stunningly beautiful Kangra Valley of the Indian Himalayan state of Himachel Pradesh.

Notes:

1 This came to me through a friend who received it from the Federation for the Preservation of Mahayana Buddhism (FPMT) electronic news list in February of 2000.

2 These are three of seven factors of enlightenment, outlined by the historical Buddha. The seven are mindfulness, investigation, energy (interest, perseverance)*, bliss, tranquility, concentration, and equanimity (Namgyal Rinpoche, 1992). *This comes from the Sanskrit term virya, which is commonly translated as “energy” or “perseverance.” I prefer the use of the term “interest,” as some IMF teachers and Namgyal Rinpoche (personal communications) sometimes use, for it gives the sense of an active energy that does not arise just by force of will, but by a more joyful engagement with the object of study or attention. I use the Sanskrit terms in the specification of the seven factors of enlightenment found later in this chapter to help those conversant with Sanskrit sort out the terms from their translations.

3 The term usually applied is “fruition” rather than “fruits,” but I like the latter because it is more consistent with the naturalistic metaphor of ground and paths.

4 Some contemporary Western Buddhist teachers like Stephen Bachelor (1997) are attempting to move Buddhism away from a focus on the doctrine of karma, suggesting that it is not necessary to invoke for a path to be Buddhist. This is no doubt based on the fact that karma is an extremely hidden phenomenon that cannot be validly known (comprehensively) through either reason or direct experience, but instead is a fruit of the realization of Buddhahood. So, one must reason through one’s trust in another (a Buddha) to accept its validity. This is considered a very weak form of knowledge—basically a reasoned “belief” or theory. Others, like Robert Thurman of Columbia University (Tricycle magazine, summer 1997), argue that karma and reincarnation are necessary tenets to accept to safeguard an effective view and path.

5 This is based on the seven [interrelated] factors of enlightenment as taught by the historical Buddha. There are mindfulness, investigation, energy (that can be understood as interest and/or perseverance), rapture or joy (bliss), tranquility, concentration, and equanimity (Namgyal Rinpoche, 1992). In oral teachings, Namgyal Rinpoche expressed the view that so long as one is in a state of interest, one is in a state of love—whether or not that interest is directed at a sentient being or a non-sentient or abstract subject.

6 Kant referred to “enthusiasm,” a form of passion that could appear to be similar to compassion in that it is described by Kant as a feeling moving towards and ideal or “perfection” of virtue. While he favoured this over a narrow empiricism, he nonetheless felt it was unstable and elitist: “Mystical enthusiasm...can never be a lasting condition for any great number of people” (Kneller, p. 464). He concluded that only reasoning through universal rights based on the principal of generalizing one’s own actions across the population could offer an accessible and effective ethics for the masses. The argument against mixing feelings or a “virtue-based” ethics with a rational one continues to this day. As recently as the autumn of 1999 I heard a political philosopher from an Ontario university (CBC radio, “This Morning”, October, 1999) arguing for rational universals and against compassion as the ethical foundation for a just society. In
this case, the speaker was concerned about a brand of “conservative” compassion mounting in the right wing politics of the USA, but extended it to a critique of compassion in general.

7 For a good discussion of the marginalization of charity, its gradual restrictive interpretation as philanthropy in Western post-Enlightenment thought, the privileging of rationalized rights over obligations (responsibilities), as well as a way to reconcile discussions of rational rights with virtues, see O’Neill (1989).

8 Compassion is not pity in the Buddhist practice, at least not in the conventional understanding of “pity”. For instance, I was instructed to reflect on handicapped people with the understanding that it could be my own experience—to appreciate the suffering more personally and empathically, but minimizing the sense of separation. Likewise, one in the 8 stanzas of mind training one is instructed to look on beings who suffer greatly as like a precious gem, very difficult to find. The correct attitude here is to value or cherish others, especially those suffering for what both they and their suffering can teach us; not to pity them.

9 For a similar attempt to reclaim compassion in the Western Christian tradition from its association with pity and pain, see Mathew Fox (1979).

10 This is a criticism being made in feminist research theories as well. For a discussion of the philosophical struggles between Kantian autonomy and the ethic of care in feminist research, see Schott (1996, p. 480-483).

11 The rational moral theories of the Enlightenment, which contributed to the marginalization of compassion as a significant secular ethic in Western thought (as opposed to practice), were associated with the emergence of the construct of the autonomous individual separated from and controlling others and the world. For a good discussion of the emergence of this notion of individual autonomy, see Schneewind (1998). This construct of autonomy is countered by reflections and actions of love and compassion, which arise in relation, that is, with the realization of interconnectedness and interdependence of one form of another.

12 This came from teachings I received from HH the Dalai Lama at Sera Monastery in December 1997 and January 1998. These teachings were a commentary on Kedrup Je’s A Dose of Emptiness, see Cabezon (1992).

13 The Scottish Enlightenment tended to focus on technological innovations and economic (e.g. Adam Smith), the English on aesthetics and economics (e.g. John Stuart Mill), the Americans progress through economics and democratic politics, and the French Enlightenment on human rights, political theory and action (e.g. Voltaire). While all these countries had philosophers who contributed to defining the overall Western Enlightenment phenomenon, it was in Germany that it found the most sustained and systematic study of the epistemology of Enlightenment. Also, I wanted to narrow the spectrum of analysis to give the reader a flavour, rather than a smorgasbord, of enlightenment.

14 This debate began with an article in a Berlin journal that asked, “What is enlightenment?” Schmidt (1996) recounts: “For the next decade a debate on the nature and limits of enlightenment raged in pamphlets and journals. In the process, the ideals and aspirations of the Enlightenment were subjected to a scrutiny so thorough it is only a slight exaggeration to suggest that subsequent critics have raised few points that were not already considered in the 1780’s” (p. 2a).

15 See Chapter 1, note #1 for a detailed explanation of the sense in which I use the term “modernity.”

16 See Schneewind (1998) for a good discussion of the intellectual development of the construct of autonomy as it culminated in the work of Kant.

17 For more discussion of this, see Jane Kneller, (1996).

18 Swedenborg was a popular mystic in Europe in the 18th century. Interestingly, he was an early teacher and spiritual guide of William Blake who is identified by many as the founder of English aesthetic Romanticism. Romanticism is often presented as a reaction against the Enlightenment, though I think its emphasis on revolution, ideals, and the perfection of humanity make it more compatible with Enlightenment than is often presented. The difference lies in the value Romantics place on direct experience versus reason. They privilege the nature and experience over reason, without abandoning the project of reason.

19 See Bittner (1996) for a discussion of the negative basis of Kant’s view of Enlightenment as “not” superstition or self-incurred immaturity. This negative perspective became manifest as the critical basis of the Kantian tradition of practical reason.

20 For a discussion of this relationship between ontology and epistemology, see Dreyfus (1997) p. 48-49.

This is articulated in the "Sevenfold Division" of consciousness into: 1) direct perceivers; 2) inferential cognizers; 3) subsequent cognizers; 4) correctly assuming consciousness (information heard but not reasoned through; also called a "conviction"); 5) awareness to which the object appears but is not ascertained (i.e. experience something but don’t recognize it, as when you are distracted and a horse passes by but you don’t see it); 6) doubting consciousness (two-pointed; undecided); and 7) wrong consciousness (e.g. see a snake but it’s a rope). Of these seven, only the first two are considered "valid" in Dharmakirti’s articulation of Buddhist epistemology. This does not mean that the others are "wrong;" indeed, doubt is considered an important state of mind for overcoming wrong views, and a correctly assuming consciousness is the precursor to a valid inference. This comes from Lati Rinpochay (1980) p. 15-16. See also Perdue (1976).

In most Buddhist texts the direct experience of emptiness and the direct realization of emptiness are treated as synonymous. Mind and action are understood to co-inhere according to Buddhist understanding; so, the experience of emptiness is understood to unfold as if lawfully in the realization of the deceptive nature of appearances in one's overall experience of the world. This arises as an implicit or spontaneous appreciation of phenomena as interdependently arisen on the basis of their parts, causes, and imputation by a consciousness. I treat direct experience and realization as separate only to assist readers to discern the fact that the insight of emptiness is not some disengaged nirvana but an insight that deeply affect the way one lives in the world.

Buddhists understand that aspects of the sensible world are inaccessible to ordinary sensory perception and have to be inferred through reasoning before they can be directly known—as Kant would say, these phenomena need to be reasoned first in the intelligible world. Buddhism doesn’t see such differences in terms of sensible and intelligible worlds, of course, but rather as apparent, hidden, and extremely hidden phenomena. While an apparent phenomena is immediately accessible to direct sensory perception, a hidden phenomenon must first be known by constructing a valid inference, which can become a condition in turn for a direct realization of that phenomenon as a yogic direct perception. Extremely hidden phenomena, like karma, can only be known validly by a Buddha, and so must be reasoned on the basis of the trustworthiness of the source.

See Jose Cabezon’s (1992).

For a good discussion of this, see Jose Cabezon (1994).

For these and related orientalist critiques of Buddhist scholarship in the West, see Lopez, Jr. (1995).

In numerous contexts (for example, The Dalai Lama (1997) Healing anger, and the (1996) video Secular meditations), HH the Dalai Lama has reiterated that analytical meditation (systematic reflection and analysis) is more effective in overcoming anger than single-pointed meditation (i.e. holding a sustained object of concentration). Anger can prove an obstacle to the cultivation of compassion, so analytical meditation—i.e. thought and reasoning—is important to that end. I might add that not all anger is conceived to be negative though, as in the case of “rightful indignation” or as an energetic aspect of the human constitution that is used to draw out the skillful means needed to enact compassion.

Langer (1997) does not indicate whether or not her use of the term mindfulness is derived from the Buddhist tradition, but instead defines her understanding of mindfulness strictly within education, psychology and learning theory.

This idea of wellness and education emerged for me from two sources I feel obliged to credit. The first was a notable conference on Tibetan Medicine sponsored by George Washington University in November, 1998. The other source is the Society for Compassionate Education, and it was through our discussions that this took shape; in particular, I would mention Dr. Heesoon Bai who had begun to look at Aristotle’s sense of healing and wellness in her own work in education.

Eudemonia or wellness in Aristotle’s sense is an objective understanding of being well in contrast to the more subjective sense of being happy. Such objective wellness, according to Aristotle, arises from physical
health and material security, which are insufficient conditions for wellbeing in the Buddhist sense of the term.

37 Candace Pert, Ph.D. (1997) has researched and written extensively on the connection between emotions and peptides, which in turn serve as the communication and hence regulatory system of the body. So, these are the probable physiological mechanism that would explain the direct healing effects of the state of love and compassion.

38 For any who are in doubt, I offer the following examples of irrationality in science and the scientific process:

1. Intuition plays a much greater role in scientific discoveries than tends to be acknowledged (reason has much more to do with the stage of justification, corroboration, and some aspects of explanation than with discovery) (see Boden, 1994).

2. Science is closed to consider certain subjects, no matter how rational and even empirically supportable they may be. So, for instance, in spite of extremely strong multivariate data analysis, the evidence supporting ESP as a statistically probable phenomena is ignored steadfastly by the mainstream scientific community as the quintessentially non-scientific claim! Furthermore, on rational grounds it would help explain many of the enigmatic findings in quantum physics, but as one physicist said to me, “it is not part of the givens!”.

3. The results of scientific studies are often ignored if it contradicts orthodox understanding; in some cases, the knowledge eventually breaks through, but in how many cases does it not and remain forever ignored or unprinted in major journals. An instance of this is the discovery that most cases of ulcers are caused by a bacteria and hence treatable by antibiotics. This research was steadfastly rejected as that of a quack until a few scientist decided to test it out and repeated the findings. Candace Pert (1999) describes how much funding drives this process in the drug development research.

4. Some scientific research is potentially harmful to the wellbeing of life on earth—hence our personal and collective wellbeing as people and sentient beings—yet scientists persevere regardless. This could include research into military arms development, eugenics, some aspects of genetic engineering (arguably), and so on.
RED: ...inference

Chapter three...
Red fire, flowing blood

My cup runneth over, red, in streaming flames to untamed seas. Untamed red oceans of blood behind epidermal screens...oxygenating, creating, and learning to be. We design our living on skin-films stretching, forgetting the promise of red, the promise that keeps us alive. Veins of fire, flames of blood, streaming across poppy fields and cranberries, empty containers of Cocacola and Campbell soup, a Canadian flag. Communism. Maraschino cherries, hot chilli peppers, Chilean wines. A Greek tomato. A gentle, waving ocean of robes, above which float a fleet of shaven heads poised to listen. Or later, in a courtyard filled with questions, flapping and clapping thoughts into sails, still filled with the breezy mantra-motion of wind from red mouths moving.

Red coalesces in bodies, sexy and tender, where nerves converge in search of one another--patches of pleasure / buttons of bliss. We lose ourselves, bathed in the metamorphosis of fire. The last colour to slumber when the lights go out.

...The last colour to slumber when the lights go out. As daylight dims and the hues of the world with it, red alone remains. Cones of photopic vision shut down as scotopic vision turns on, colour blind. In the transition, only red persists until it too passes into night. Red is a distinction no other creatures make. We are born in it and the world to us, through a red amniotic veil. Our faces emerge from the veil to wed us everafter to a life of red...to a life, to a world, mapped red. Look to the legend; follow it to the heart. The red heart. Still beating. Still. Beating.

Still, to dare to bear red! Indian women wear red; they wed in red as vermillion lines weave across the palms of their hands. They mourn in white, but for the heart they turn to red. I too dye my body red. With skin stained scarlet, I paint blood-veins for a
journey to the heart. I am carried to the infra-zone, and bend biology to witness. Electric lines lead to visions of holy men, a teacher, and a creature of light. Love satiating all desire--impossibly brilliant and beautiful. A liquid red love to dye in...

...a red to die in, the face of Mars, the god of war. The flesh and blood of bodies no longer contained, but spilling red over battlefields. An escarpment of cascading red, until fields become flowers and we forget... In Flanders' fields... It is visceral, this red—torturous yet touching. It is the sweet scent of the vulnerable succumbing. Of desire, coming: “Drink this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant that is shed for you.” More than blood, it tastes of love, an intoxicating bliss. In its shadow, we dissipate and dissolve. Desire: “COME!”/ death: “STOP!”. Between the two, a black night. We colour the distinctions of our world red.

*October 1997, Journal notes: Dolma Ling, Sidhpur, HP, INDIA*

*Something unusual happened yesterday. I was reviewing the debate vocabulary on cards and as I looked down at the Tibetan word for consequences, thel-gyur, I started to cry. My tears continued for several minutes. “Thel-gyur” refers to the form of consequentialist logic used to present philosophical views in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. I noticed how perfect the word appeared on the card, and it was as if I fell in love with it. I once read that a student is suitable to receive teachings on emptiness if tears (of joy) appear in their eyes on hearing the teachings, or even just the word.*

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1 See Tupten (1994) p. 59. As Kensur Yeshey Tupten points out, such biological signs indicate a past life connection, and, paradoxically, are the principal qualification for a student to hear teachings on emptiness in this life.
Spelling out one possibility in red: *A not B* (a colour but not red)

C: What is the distinction between the two, colour and red?

D: There are three possibilities.

C: It follows that there are not three possibilities. Which pervades which?

D: Whatever is red is necessarily a colour; whatever is a colour is not necessarily red.

C: If there is no pervasion, posit something [i.e. a colour but not red].

D: The subject, white.

C: It follows that the subject, white, is a colour.

D: I accept that white is a colour.

C: The subject, white, is a colour...

D: Because of being a primary colour.

C: It follows that whatever is a primary colour is necessarily a colour.

D: I accept that whatever is a primary colour is necessarily a colour.

C: It follows that the subject, white, is not red.

D: I accept that white is not red.

C: The subject, white is not red....

D: Because the two, white and red, are mutually exclusive.

C: It follows that if the two are contradictory, then white is necessarily not red.

D: I accept that if the two, white and red, are contradictory, then white is necessarily not red.  

(Namgyal, 1995, p. 15-19)
The nuns of Dolma Ling; (right) with one of their English teachers
Debating dialectical debate:  
Reasoning education at Dolma Ling

I. Introduction:

The millennia-old practice of dialectical debate is the principal means to cultivate reason and logic in the Gelugpa monastic curriculum of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. "Dialectics," in this case, closely resembles the classical Socratic sense of a form of reasoning that progresses through a sequence of questions and answers. Buddhist dialectical debate training differs from Socratic dialectics in emphasizing student-to-student interactions (that is, peer tutoring) rather than student-to-teacher interactions (that is, apprenticeship), though teacher-student exchanges are an aspect of formal Buddhist debate classes. A more contemporary understanding of dialectics, with application to the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist system, comes from M.I.T. communication theorist Isaacs (1999) who defines dialectics as: "the productive antagonism of two points of view. A dialectic pits different ideas against one another and then makes space for new ideas to emerge out of both" (p. 45). Here dialectics, a form of discussion he calls "skilled conversation," is analytical, "uses hard data to get to answers to problems," and makes explicit all reasoning (p. 41).

Isaacs (1999) distinguishes such dialectical conversations from more defensive, adversarial forms of debate found in modern parliamentary, public, corporate and pedagogical practices. These defensive, polarized debates do not even warrant being labeled as conversations (that is, as "turning together"), because they are ordinarily resolved "by beating down" or defeating an opponent. According to Isaacs, they are
generated from a defensive posture, and extend through controlled discussions based on “advocacy, competition and abstract verbal brawling” (p. 41). He claims that such patterns of communication stem from an individualistic ethos that has led people in organizations and communities to learn to think and communicate “alone.” Although advocating dialogue, Isaacs recognizes that when decisions need to be made, it is necessary to employ discussion rather than open-ended dialogue. Discussions, in his use of the term, necessarily begin from a defensive posture insofar as one is poised to defend a choice, but a productive use of such defensiveness is through skillful conversation and dialectics. The more common unproductive use of such defensiveness, according to Isaacs (p. 41), is through controlled discussions and debate (Diagram I, “Conversation decision-making tree”).

In the Tibetan practice of dialectical debate, students rehearse and deepen their understanding of the complex system of definitions and categories dealing with what could broadly be called Buddhist “mind science.” The format of debate provides an effective method whereby students can practice the rather dry terms, definitions and logic in a socially-stimulating context through rapid sequences of questions and answers punctuated with dramatic physical gestures. At the same time, these ritualized conversations instill a pattern and habit of logical reasoning and analytical thinking. So, the motivation for the debates is pedagogical (that is, to learn definitions, categories, and reasoning) rather than to argue or establish moral or ethical choices. Indeed, students can knowingly present statements that are untrue to challenge their opponent, or to demonstrate the logical outcome of a fallacious line of reasoning.
Conversation decision-making tree:

**Conversations**
- **Deliberation** ("to weigh out")
  - **Suspend**
    - Listening without resistance; dis-identify
  - **Defend**
    - "to ward off, protect from attack"

**Fundamental choice point**

**Reflective Dialogue**
- Explores underlying causes, rules, and assumptions to get to deeper questions and framing of problems

**Generative Dialogue**
- Invents unprecedented possibilities and new insights; produces a collective flow

**Skillful Conversation**
- **Skillful**
  - Analytic, uses hard data to get to answers to problems; reasoning made explicit

**Dialectic**
- Tension and synthesis of opposites

**Unproductive Defensiveness**

**Controlled Discussion**
- Advocacy, competing; abstract verbal brawling

**Debate**
- Resolve by beating down

Isaacs (1979)
The debates are conducted in pairs or small groups, for between two and three hours a day. The challenger assumes a standing posture, addressing a seated nun who is the defender (that is, of the memorized text). From my observations and interviews with students and teachers, I would conclude that these “debates” can fall into either of Isaacs’ productive (dialectics) or unproductive (debate) categories. Challengers, for instance, are encouraged to understand their line of questions as a way to help their opponent overcome fallacious reasoning and doubt, and to thereby construct valid inferences on the topics discussed. They are discouraged from engaging in debate out of competitive motivations or a desire to “beat down” their opponents. Nonetheless, I found evidence of such competition and aggression, though among the nuns there was an overall impression of co-operation and co-investigation (that is, what Isaacs calls “dialectical” discussions).

The Tibetan form of debate is highly ritualized with complex gestures. After posing her question, the challenger claps, rotates her body in a full circle. She waits for the defender to respond before commencing the complex hand and feet gestures as she articulates her next challenge, followed by a clap of hands. There is no external judge or arbiter for these debates—the pair themselves witness; the logic of established reason judges; while reasons, experiences and memorized passages of text stand as evidence. These debates are held outside in debate courtyards or on the monastic grounds when the courtyards are full. Usually, the debaters are spread evenly in pairs or small groups, debating simultaneously and with vigour. Only in certain ceremonies, competitions, or evaluations will individual debaters perform (in pairs or small groups) before an audience and/or judges. These public pedagogical events capture audience attentions with their animated sounds, movements, and dialectical dialogue—signs of cooperative learning.
II. Historical and social contexts:

There is a long history of dialectical debate practice in India, dating back to at least as early as the Upanishads and hence pre-dating the life of the historical Buddha (circa 500 BCE), who used dialectical debate as an important pedagogy and rhetorical device for explaining and defending his view. Samdong Rinpoche (1981a) points out that the Buddha appeared in councils in debate with his disciples and opponent Brahmins (p. 22). Furthermore, in the Buddha’s time, women occasionally engaged in debate as well as men. In the Therigatha, for example, Bhadda Kundalakesa, who met the Buddha when she was still a wandering Jain nun, is purported to have been famous for her mastery of philosophical debate. She converted to Buddhism on the basis of a debate she had with Sariputta, a disciple of the Buddha, who, after answering all her debate questions, is purported to have queried her: “One, what is that?” When Bhadda realized she couldn’t answer, she asked to meet his teacher. She became the only nun to receive monastic ordination spontaneously from the Buddha, who did so merely by proclaiming “Bhadda, Come” when he saw her (Murcott, 1991, p. 46-47).¹

Dialectical debate assumed increasing importance in the training of monks with the progressive institutionalization of Buddhist education in India and the mounting number and sophistication of the Buddhist corpus of texts and commentaries. At the same time, monastic universities like Nalanda and Valabhi emerged and expanded until, by the 7th centuries, they drew thousands of students that included non-Buddhists and Buddhists alike—predominantly monks. The curriculum began with Sanskrit grammar and logic, two topics connected in Indian classical studies, where students developed both linguistic and reasoning skills through the practice of debate; these included discussions of non-
Buddhist schools. These preliminary studies were followed by the core curriculum, which included the Buddhist Vinaya (ethics) and the Mahayana texts of Asanga and Maitreya (Buddha Nature), Dignaga and Dharmakirti (epistemology), and the lineage of Nagarjuna (Madyamika philosophy) (Cook, 1992, p. 354-362). The Tibetan monastic curriculum has conserved aspects of this framework to varying degrees depending on the school.

There are conflicting accounts of the importance of debate in these Indian Buddhist monastic universities. Dreyfus (1997) suggests “in traditional Indian Buddhism, debate seems to have been an occasional skill used mostly in public” (p. 46). Yet, according to Samdong Rinpoche (1981) “the practice of debate became indispensable in the life of the scholars of Buddhist monastic institutions [in India] from A.D. 400 to A.D. 1200” (p. 22). This is corroborated by the first-hand account of the 7th century Chinese pilgrim Hsuan-tsang, who painted Nalanda as an institution much more preoccupied with intellectual debate and discussion than with single-pointed meditation, though it is difficult to know how formal the debates were (Cook, 1992). Certainly the elaborate ritualistic physical gestures appear to be a later Tibetan addition (Samdong Rinpoche, 1981a, p. 24).

Nonetheless, Hsuan-tsang presents Nalanda as animated with debate:

…The day is not sufficient for asking and answering profound questions. From morning till night [the monks] engage in discussion; the old and the young mutually help one another. Those who cannot discuss questions out of the Tripitaka are little esteemed and are obliged to hide themselves for shame. Learned men from different cities, on this account, who desire to acquire quickly
a renown in discussion, come here in multitudes to settle their doubts, and then the streams (of their wisdom) spread far and wide. (p. 359)

Hsuan-tsang describes a practice I have heard recounted in oral teachings by Tibetan lamas about Nalanda: “If men of other quarters desire to enter and take part in the discussions, the keeper of the gate proposes some hard questions; many are unable to answer and retire. One must have studied deeply both old and new (books) before getting admission” (Cook, 1992, p. 361). Nalanda is identified with the scholastic tradition of Buddhism in particular, and was the alma mater of many of the foremost Indian Buddhist scholars and commentators still studied and revered in Tibetan Buddhism, including Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Dignaga, Dharmakirti, Santideva, and Vasubandhu. Thurman (1984) describes the typical day of one of these teachers, Vasubandhu, who served as abbot of Nalanda. “[He] worked twenty hours a day, teaching and ordaining monks in the morning, teaching Universal Vehicle philosophy during the afternoon, sometimes for twelve hours at a stretch, and dividing the night between a short sleep and periods of meditation” (p. 43). To this day, the images of these great scholars, often depicted using debate gestures as they teach, are found in Tibetan monasteries and universities in exile.

The continuity between Indian and Tibetan teachers, lineages, commentarial texts, and pedagogical practices has led many to identify the form of Buddhism practiced in Tibet as Indo-Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetans’ strong identification and connection with Indian Buddhism dates back to a legendary debate in Tibet during the 7th century during the reign of Srongtsen Gampo—the Bsam yas debate between the Indian Buddhist scholar Kamalasila and the Chinese Buddhist scholar Hoshang. Significantly, this debate is purported to have concerned the role of analytical thinking (that is, reason) and
conceptual thought in the process of enlightenment. Hoshang, who some scholars link with a form of Chinese Hwa shang Mahayana Buddhism, contended that “no conceptualization should be used in the course of meditation and that every thought must be fenced off. He said that thought-voidness is the instantaneous mode of realizing the truth, [and] that the highest form of meditation is to eliminate the response of the mind to external objects” (Rinpoche, 1981, p. 28). On the other hand, Kamalasila, his Indian opponent, disputed this view by claiming that wisdom is predicated on a form of conceptual introspection characterized by “analysis and argumentation” (p. 28). Kamalasila’s vindication of logic and analytical meditation continues to be argued in Tibetan monastic education, especially in the Gelugpa school.

Kamalasila argued that his opponent’s position suffered under the fault of quietism (van der Kuijp, 1986, p.147). On this basis, it is said that Tibet, under the authority of the king and aristocrats, accepted the Indian lineage of Buddhism as their own. A group of Tibetan scholars were sent to India to develop a written script based on Sanskrit that could translate Indian root and commentary texts into a language more accessible to Tibetans. During the subsequent centuries, many Indian teachers and Tibetan students commuted across Tibet’s borders, including Padmasambava, Marpa, and Atisha, the principal root lamas of the Nyingma, Kargyu, and Sakya/Gelug lineages respectively. Between the 10th and 12th centuries, Buddhism disappeared in India under the assault of Turkish invading forces, but survived in Tibet where it continued to be conserved and developed to the present day. Indeed, rather poetically, though under regrettable circumstances, Tibetans have re-introduced the tradition in India by re-establishing their
III. Textual and oral practices in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist education:

What designates a "tradition" as such is a consistent worldview and culture (that is, a complex array of practices informed by that worldview) and a community of people who participate in the worldview and culture. Education, both formal and informal, is an important means to socialize people into a "tradition." The Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition developed a system of education based on a combination of scholasticism and hermeneutics. In his comparative study of scholasticism, Cabezon (1994) defines scholasticism, as found in Islamic, Hebrew, Christian and Buddhist traditions, as the attempt to systematically reconcile the inconsistencies of a tradition through reasoned analysis (p.53-55). All these traditions rely on a circumscribed set of "scriptures" that form the corpus of the articulation of the central tenets of the tradition's worldview. The difficulty is that there are inconsistencies in these scriptures that require interpretation to reconcile. On this basis, these traditions all developed varying degrees of hermeneutical practices that allowed a pattern of interpretation that permitted the continuation of a sense of an integrated tradition. Hermeneutics is the theory of scriptural interpretation and exegesis is its practice (p. 71). Cabezon (1994) conveys some of the complexities of the relationship between scholastic and hermeneutical practices in traditions:

Scholasticism is a systematic and rationalist enterprise. At the same time scholastics are committed to maintaining scripture both as the basis for and the testing ground of philosophical speculation. But the scriptural canon, much to the
chagrin of the systematician, is not univocal—it is filled with internal inconsistencies; nor is it always rational—presenting us with a plethora of claims that challenge both experience and reasoning. What this means, of course, is that the implementation of the scholastic’s rationalist, systematic, and holistic vision requires sophisticated hermeneutical skills. ...Scholastic hermeneutics is essentially a balancing act, one whose aim it is to simultaneously uphold the three things most dear to scholastics: scripture, rationality, and the ideology that constitutes its unitary vision of the world. (p. 70)

Hermeneutical practices permit students to re-invent the tradition and to re-frame the original insights of the Buddha within their own literary and intellectual contexts, reconstructing the history of their tradition and culture in a manner better suited to their institutional and social circumstances. Eventually, commentaries themselves became the root texts of the system, as is the case now within the various monastic schools and scholarly programs in Tibetan Buddhist institutions. This is one sense in which the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition can be considered an enlightenment “tradition of invention.” Indeed, interpreting commentaries has become a central exegetical preoccupation of monastic education, complemented by dialectical debate, which is a more performative than textual exegetical practice. Together, they form the scholarly basis of monastic education.

Yet, to draw too definitive a distinction between texts and oral performances misrepresents the complexity of the system. As the debate practice established itself in Tibet, for instance, there developed around it elaborate debate manuals. Samdong Rinpoche (1981a) points out that these manuals were a distinctive Tibetan invention (p.

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24). Furthermore, Newland (1996) suggests that the arcane logical and philosophical
differences between the debate manuals of certain colleges are themselves performative
in that they establish group (collegial) affiliations rather than meaningful intellectual
distinctions (p. 208). Likewise, Dreyfus (1997) argues that the commentary tradition is
not only a content but is performative insofar as it creates “textual communities, that is,
actual social entities formed around common uses of basic texts and their commentaries.
... In this way, common interpretive practices provide the focus for further
institutionalization and the development of rules. They also become the means through
which new members are introduced to the community” (p. 32).

Likewise, the oral practices in Tibetan monastic education are not restricted to the
practice of debate. For instance, to study a Buddhist text, a student is encouraged first to
receive a ceremonial lung or permission blessing from one’s lama in which the lama
reads the text orally at a very fast speed. Optimally, this ritual follows or is followed by
oral commentary on the text by the same lama. Even the five core texts of the Gelugpa
curriculum and their corresponding debate manuals are read, chanted and memorized
orally. Chanting or rhythmic reading allows students to memorize the material easier, a
phenomenon described in this century by Homeric scholars like Millman Parry and Eric
Havelock (CBC Ideas, 1988) who explained the rhythmic and poetic stanzas of Homer as
mnemonic devices required in oral culture (p. 2).

IV. The monastic curriculum:

The debate tradition is the dominant pedagogical activity in the more scholarly and
sutra-oriented Gelug school of monastic education, in contrast to the Nyingma school
which emphasizes commentarial exegesis and Tantric meditation. One might find a rough analogy in the difference between the theological and contemplative emphases of the Dominican and Cistercian orders, respectively, in Roman Catholicism. Dreyfus (1997) compared the curriculum of a Gelugpa monastic university, Sera, with the nearby Nyingma monastic university, Namdrol Ling, both located in Bylakuppe in Karnataka State in southern India. (Sera monastery has over 3000 monks, and Namdrol Ling over three hundred.) He concluded that Sera was a debating institution while Namdrol Ling was a commentary institution, and that this constitutes the principal distinction between the Gelug and Nyingma educational traditions. Sera structures about 20 years of study around five principal root texts and an elaborate program of dialectical debate. There are three stages to the curriculum: 1) the preliminary stage lasting one to five years in which students master the techniques and basic concepts needed to practice debate; 2) a central stage in which five core exoteric subjects and texts are studied during a 10-15 year period; and 3) a post-graduate stage in which students engage in esoteric studies of Tantric texts and meditations (and the Guhyasamaya Tantra in particular) over a two-year period in a separate Tantric college, either Gyume or Gyuto monasteries. In other words, the study of (Tantric) meditations is not part of the official curriculum of Sera at all but is instead handled by affiliated but distinct post-graduate monastic institutions.

The Nyingma institution, on the other hand, emphasizes the study of commentarial texts--approximately 22 texts over a nine-year period. It too is divided into three gradations: 1) one preliminary year (two texts); 2) followed by five years to study the thirteen great texts of the sutra or exoteric path; and 3) two final years to study the tantric or esoteric texts (the Guhyagarbha Tantra in particular). Whereas in the Gelugpa
sites, monastic and scholastic institutions are combined, in the Nyingma case the monastic and scholastic institutions are separated. Only a small proportion of Nyingma monks participate in the scholarly curriculum. Most monks are preoccupied instead with meditations and rituals. This difference is more muted but nonetheless apparent in the nunneries in exile as well. Dolma Ling, which is said to be non-sectarian (that is, Rime) but is in fact modeled on the Gelug curriculum, emphasizes scholastics, whereas the main Nyingma nunnery in Dharamsala, a transplant version of the Tibetan Shungsep nunnery, puts more emphasis on rituals and prayers.

Historically, nuns in India and Tibet did not participate in the scholastic curriculum with its combined commentarial and debate practices, regardless of their particular lineage. Indeed, nuns were rarely literate, but instead emphasized reciting prayers and conducting simple rituals. Disappearance in Tibet of the full ordination lineage for nuns has only exacerbated gender inequities in the system. Now, to reinstate full ordination or institute a fully-functioning debate curriculum, the nuns are having to secure the support and compliance of the conservative establishment of monk-administrators, and that is proving difficult. Even the most rudimentary stage of finding monk-teachers has proved difficult for Dolma Ling, where few geshes or monks have agreed to work and those few who do have not remained long.

V. Introductory texts and topics:

In the traditional Gelugpa monastic curriculum, after learning to read and write and before commencing the core curriculum, students spend anywhere from one to five years engaged in memorizing root texts and participating in preliminary debates on basic
definitions & categories, minds, and logic. Special debate classes are held with qualified instructors who scaffold students through the detailed debate manuals (mtshen nyi pe cha), debate practices, and topics of debate. The manuals may include explicit sample debates, or the teachers themselves may model the debates based on principles introduced in the manuals. These preliminary texts are all derived from what Tibetans call the Indian "Sautrantika Following Reasoning" school of Buddhist epistemology. This is the philosophical view articulated in the root text on valid cognition used in the core monastic curriculum, Dharmakirti’s *A Commentary to (Dignaga’s Compendium of) Validities (Pramanavarttika).* “Root texts” generally refer to Indian philosophical texts that served as the basis for subsequent Tibetan commentaries and debate manuals.

According to Sautrantika Following Reasoning, all phenomena are exhaustively represented under two categories—permanent and impermanent. Of impermanent phenomena, there are three exhaustive subcategories—those with physical qualities (form); those with qualities of consciousness (consciousness); and those with neither (compositional factors not associated with mental factors, such as instincts and ‘selves’ or ‘persons’). In first identifying the difference between consciousness, form, and selves, one can better recognize and investigate their interrelationship. The preliminary studies are in three subject areas: 1) *Collected Topics (bsdu gra)*—basic definitions, logic, and debates focussing on physical qualities (that is, form); 2) *Types of Mind (blo rig)*—the categorization of various types of awareness or consciousness; and, 3) *Types of Evidence (rtaks rigs)*—signs and reasoning. These are presented and studied in this order over a three to five year period.
VI. The language-game of dialectical debate:

Indo-Tibetan Buddhist debate training can be considered an intentional and elaborate language game that serves to socialize students into a new, more subtle awareness of language and consciousness. “Language game” is a term coined by Wittgenstein (1953/1958): “The processes of naming ... and of repeating words after someone might also be called language-games. I shall also call the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the ‘language game’” (p. 5).

Characterizing certain systems of human thought and language as a game accentuates the fact that it is rule-bounded, purposive, and embedded in a particular social context. Baker and Hacker (1980) identify the following components of a Wittgensteinian language-game (p. 89-99), which I use to conduct an overview of Tibetan debate training:

A. words and sentences (terms and grammar or logical relation)

B. instruments (gestures, patterns)

C. context (history, background)

D. characteristic activity

E. antecedent training and learning in which rules are imparted

F. use of components of the language-game

G. its point or purpose
A. Words and sentences:

1. Words as definitions, divisions, and illustrations:

The common adjective designating debate in Tibetan is mTshen nyid (that is, debate, as in debate class, debate school, debate text, etc.). This term means "definitions" rather than "debate," and highlights the central role that language, definitions, and the categorization of terms have for the Tibetan system of dialectical debate. In this respect, it is analogous to learning a scientific taxonomy where strong emphasis is placed on the precise use of language, categories, definitions, and logic to establish terms and their relations. Indeed, the Tibetan term for science is mTshen rigs, a term that translates something like "defining types/reasons." The definitions, their (sub)divisions, and their relations are learned and constructed through dialectical debate, such that each successive stage depends on the earlier vocabulary and logic for its efficacy. Consider the following sample debate between bsDu gra students at Dolma Ling (April 18, 1998):

C: Base being the water, it is not sound?

D: I agree [it is not].

C: Why is water not sound?

D: Because it is not hearing.

C: Does it pervade that what is not hearing is not sound?

D: I agree.

C: Isn’t there sound to the water?
D: Why not?

C: Then is water sound?

D: Why so? That which has sound does not mean that it is sound [emphasis mine]. For instance, you have hands but you are not hands, are you?

Here we have a case of a repeated distinction being drawn between two mutually exclusive phenomena (aGal wa). Both sound and water are subdivisions of form, which is divided into five categories according to the sense in which that form arises as an object. So, for example, the first division is “form sense-sphere” (subdivided into colour and shape), referring to phenomena that arise in vision. The remaining subdivisions of form are sound, odour, taste and tangible object sense-spheres. The tangible object sense-sphere has two divisions—tangible object as an element and tangible object arisen from the elements. Water is a case of the first subdivision, that of the elements (earth, water, fire, wind) (Namgyal Monastery, 1995, p. 3-7). For this reason, water and sound are mutually exclusive phenomena such that what is sound cannot be water and vice versa; although water can have sound it cannot be sound. We see a parallel pattern of reasoning to that of the Law of the Excluded Middle of Aristotelian logic.

a) The language tree of “Colours and so forth”

In embarking on the study of the first chapter of the Collected Topics, the preliminary debate text that covers the subject of “Colours and so forth,” a student learns a series of definitions, divisions (categories), and illustrations. These form linguistic or conceptual trees that are hierarchically arranged from a root all-encompassing category to the branch examples and their definitions. This taxonomy is explicitly a sign system;
students are learning the names and categories of colours, not how to experience or to use such colours as an apprentice artist might. That comes later with Tantric meditations and arts training. Debate teachers and texts do not explicitly organise terms and divisions into visual language trees; instead, the material is presented in expository and debate texts. The tree structure is nonetheless implicit in the organization of the terms, divisions, and their order of presentation. The (upside-down) tree structure for the “Colours and so forth” chapter are depicted in Figure 1, and specifically those dealing with form and the form sense-sphere.\textsuperscript{18}

2. Sentences: The logic, grammar, and discourse moves

a) The logic:

The logic of Tibetan dialectical reasoning is used to establish the relations between signs; such logic is not conveyed symbolically as in Western logic (for example, mathematics or symbolic logic), but through verbal illustrations. Nonetheless, we can make use of the class reasoning of Aristotelian logic to represent the four ways to logically compare any two phenomena (A, B) in the logic of Tibetan debate as follows:

1) Mutually inclusive or “one meaning” \it{(Dhon gCig)}, (all A are B; all B are A);

2) Subset or “three possibilities” \it{(Mu gSum)}, A not B, both A, B, neither A nor B;

3) Intersecting set or “four possibilities” \it{(Mu bShi)}, A not B, B not A, both A, B, neither A nor B;

4) Mutually exclusive or “contradiction” \it{(aGal Ba)}, no pervasion; contradictory, opposite (if A not B; if B not A), (Namgyal, 1995, p. 2).
Figure 1: Definitions, Divisions, and Illustrations for “Colours and so forth”

Classifying Phenomena:

I) Impermanent

A) Form*

B) Consciousness

C) Non-associated compositional factors

*External form  Internal form  Both internal and external form

II) Permanent

1) Form

2) Sound

3) Smell

4) Taste

5) Tangible object

sense-sphere  sense-sphere  sense-sphere  sense-sphere  sense-sphere

{object of an eye  {object of an ear  {object of a nose  {object of a tongue  {object of a body consciousness}  consciousness}  consciousness}  consciousness}  consciousness}

a) colour:

b) shape: *12 types

i) “root” primary colours

ii) “branch” secondary colours

{what is suitable as a hue}  {what is suitable as a shape}

{what is suitable as a “root” primary hue}  {what is suitable as a “branch” secondary hue}

• blue  {what is suitable as a blue hue}  
  (colour of blue cloth)
• white  {what is suitable as a white hue}  
  (colour of a white religious conch)
• yellow  {what is suitable as a yellow hue}  
  (colour of gold)
• red  {what is suitable as a red hue}  
  (colour of a ruby)

• the colour of a cloud which is that …  
  i.e. the colour of a secondary colour
• the colour of smoke which is that…  
  (the colour of blue-black smoke)
• the colour of dust which is that…  
  (the grayish colour of dust)
• the colour of mist which is that…  
  (the bluish colour of mist in the east)
• the colour of illumination which is that…  
  (the whitish colour of illumination)
• the colour of darkness which is that…  
  (the colour of black darkness)
• the colour of shadow which is that…  
  (the colour of the shadow of a tree)
• the colour of sunlight which is that…  
  (the colour of orange sunlight)

a) earth

{hard and obstructive}  {wet and moistening}  {hot and burning}  {light and moving}

(b) water

(religious conch shell)  (soft drink)  (butter lamp)  (lower base wind)
b) The “grammar:”

There are two types of valid sentences that form the basis of Buddhist logical grammar: 1) syllogistic (sByor wa), and 2) consequentialist (Thal aGyur) statements. Syllogistic statements consist of a thesis and a reason stated together in a single sentence, whereas consequentialist statements are arguments structurally similar to syllogisms but include a word (Thal) indicating they are extensions or outcomes of a defender’s reasoning. The difference might be between: 1) the syllogism: “Whatever is a product is impermanent” and, 2) the consequence: “It follows that the subject, colour, is impermanent because of being a product.” Note the reversed order of sign and predicate (product and impermanent, respectively). Consequentialist statements dominate the engaged logic of debates, differentiating it from formal syllogistic logic as studied in the West, what Samdong Rinpoche (1980) calls (pure) “reasoning” (p. 26). Indeed, so pivotal is consequentialist logic to Tibetan Buddhism that the philosophical view of the Gelugpa school is referred to as Madhyamika-Prasangika, or the Middle Way Consequentialist school.

In consequentialist logic, a question is posed to suggest a certain line of reasoning. It is used pedagogically rather than to assert a truth claim. So, if a defender was to say, “the bird is blue,” a challenger might answer, “It follows that the subject, the bird, is blue because of being a colour.” The challenger’s response is untrue according to Buddhist logic (birds cannot be colours because a bird is a “person,” a colour is a form, and persons and form are mutually exclusive phenomena). Nonetheless, it is a logical conclusion of the statement, “the bird is blue,” (that is, blue is a colour, so therefore the bird must be a colour.) The challenger is in effect correcting the logical grammar of the
defender, who should have said, "the colour of the bird is blue." The challenger's response shows rather than tells the defender of their error.

c) The discourse moves:

The term exchange was used by Nunan (1993), based on Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), to describe teacher-students classroom transactions, which include: 1) an opening move (initiation); 2) an answering move (response), and 3) a follow-up move (feedback) (p. 11). This is the same pattern found in Tibetan dialectical debate, serving as the basis of a conversation cycle that allows the debate to continue for an extended period. The challenger initiates the dialogue and is free to select the topic of debate. The answerer is required to respond, either by providing a definition, illustration, or evaluation of a truth statement made by a challenger. There are four distinct speech acts—what Nunan defines as functionally intentional utterances—a challenger can use, and four different ones a defender or opponent can use: 1) to establish the subject (Chos can)—that is, "The subject..."; 2) to indicate a consequence (Thal)—that is, "It follows that..."; 3) to show a reason (Phyir)—that is, "because of..."; and 4) to demand a reason (sTe)—that is, "Why...?" Likewise, the defender has four possible answers to these questions to indicate: 1) an affirmation (Dod) — "I accept;" 2) an incorrect reason (rTags ma Grub) — "The reason is not established...;" 3) the thesis not following from the reason (Khyab pa ma Byung) — "Non-pervasion;" and, 4) Demanding a reason for thesis (Ci 'i Phyir) — "Why not?" (distinguished from challenger's "Why?").

If defender uses contradictory logic or hesitates to answer, the challenger says, Tsa!. In public debates, the entire nunnery or monastery will join the questioners in clapping their hands and shouting "Tsa!" three times. The other move is for the
challenger to shout "Khor gsum!" when the defender is confused and makes statements that are contradictory. When saying this, the challenger circles her right hands three times around the head of the defender. Here is an example of the pattern of debate discourse from the final examination held in the temple of Dolma Ling in December, 1997, and is a debate between two students of the Parchen 1 class:22

C: It follows that [the truly established] is existent because it is dharma (i.e. a phenomenon).

D: I accept.

C: What is the standard for truly establishing a phenomenon?

D: That which is not conceptually designated, but established from the object itself.

C: It follows that there is such a manner of establishing truth?

D: No.

C: It follows that the subject, the truly established, it is not truly established?

D: I accept.

C: Shame! (Everyone laughs)

D: Because I haven’t seen one.

C: It follows then that a thing does not exist because you haven’t seen it?

D: I accept.

C: It follows then that you do not accept that America exists?
D: Why not?

C: It follows that it does not exist because you haven’t seen it. (Everyone laughs).

Two things are accomplished through this exchange. First, the debate is clarifying the definition and validity of the Sautantrika view that directly-perceived phenomena (that is, particulars) are “truly established” in a way that inferentially-established phenomena (that is, generalities) are not. The second and more important point of this exchange is to clarify what constitutes valid criteria to establish the existence of any phenomenon, including “the truly established,” as existent. The defender is, probable unintentionally, suggesting that only direct perception can validly establish a phenomenon. (She doesn’t seem to intend to mean this, but is confused over the fact that the phenomenon in question is “the truly established,” which is based on the direct perception of the object itself.) The challenger, on the other hand, is trying to lead the defender through her own logic to realize that any phenomena, including “the truly established,” can be validly established by way of reason or direct experience. One does not have to “see” America to validly established its existence, which is a particular place that can be asserted as “truly established” on the basis of Sautantrika reasoning. It is important to note, however, that the possibility of “the truly established” is refuted in the more subtle and less accessible Madhyamika view, which is introduced in the advanced “grades” of the monastic education program.

These preliminary debates reinforce the principle that certain phenomena can only be known initially as valid inferences. By debating epistemology, students are able to transform heard, read, or recited information about the role of reason and direct
experience into a valid inference. This inference, in turn, instills confidence for students in the value and power of reason and direct experience, such that the epistemology becomes something spontaneous and lived. In this respect, the system is reflexive in that its pedagogical contents are mirrored in its pedagogical processes (that is, in the debates.) Furthermore, the insight of emptiness arises from a valid inference, and it is on the basis of such an inference that emptiness can then experienced directly. In turn, through the direct realization of emptiness, a student or practitioner is “liberated”, which is of profound soteriological relevance in Buddhism; indeed, it is its raison-d’etre.

Accordingly, there is emphasis placed on reason and training in logic through the initial years of Gelugpa monastic education. These analytical inquiries are the antidotes to wrong views, which are considered to have profound ethical impact on the health and wellbeing of the students and their communities. “Right views,” on the other hand, arise from the Dharma, which can be either linguistic (conceptual) or experiential. In this respect, “right views” have both an epistemological and ontological dimension (a concern with both truth and reality). Overall, “wrong views” are classified as falling into one of two ontological extremes—reification and nihilism. The extreme of nihilism in particular can arise from four sources, according to Kedrup Je: 1) ontological nihilism (refuting even the nominal existence of phenomena); 2) logical skepticism (repudiating the value of logic and noncontradiction); 3) epistemological skepticism (repudiating pramana or valid knowledge; and, 4) soteriological nihilism (the view that in meditation the mind is to be emptied of all thought, linked with the “infamous” Hva Shang view) (Cabezon, 1994, p. 148). Gelugpa education is designed to lead students through “the middle way” of these extremes by educating for both conceptual and experiential realizations.
B. Instruments:

1. Gestures:

Perhaps the most unusual facet of the Tibetan debate as compared with its Indian predecessor or its European equivalent is the ritualized use of physical stances, postures, movements and gestures. Samdong Rinpoche (1981) points out that when the logic is "accompanied by physical gestures and exclamations, they highlight the wide communicability which is the intended purpose of the Tibetan debater" (p. 24). The elaborate movements and gestures arise, for the most part from the questioner, and the sequence is as follows: 1) right hand lifts up palm down, as the body rotates forward and the left foot is lifted off the ground and steps forward; 2) as soon as the question or sentence is uttered, the right hand claps the left, which is palm up; 3) at the same time, the left foot is placed firmly on the ground; 4) then, the left palm immediately rotates downwards as the left arm and palm move towards the ground; 5) the rosary, that has now slipped or been drawn down to the left wrist is drawn back up by the right hand to the left shoulder again; 6) finally, the questioner turns and pauses as s/he faces the opponent to listen to her response, becoming "ready to pose a counter-question or repudiation" (p. 25). See the sequence as depicted in the photo illustrations #1.

These gestures have symbolic meaning; for example, it is said that the placing of the left foot down on the ground and drawing the left palm downwards represents closing the doors to suffering by removing ignorance. Clapping in Tibetan culture has signified the wish to drive away demons, and in this case the demons might be those of ignorance. Also, the challenger often wraps their upper robe—zen—around their waist to accentuate their agility of body and, more symbolically, of mind. The answerer is far
Gazing through a 2500-year History: Samath, U.P., India
Samath, where the Buddha first taught (Four Noble Truths) after his enlightenment, app. 500 BCE.
(above and below) At the ruins of Samath Buddhist University near Varanasi, India.
Learning to debate:
(above) Inside a Buddhist philosophy and debate class.
(below) Debating outside in the debate courtyard and beyond.
Peer Instruction: (above) An introductory debate class taught by a senior nun. (below) Debating.
(above) The monk teachers; (the rest) debates as dialogues.
Tantric arts: (above) sand mandalas (left); prayer flags (right); (below) ritual tsok offerings.
Learning Tibetan secular and religious music
Responding to contemporary issues: (above) A Western-style debate of dialectical debate. (below) Some of children from Tibet sent into India for an education by their parents.
more meditative in their appearance, as they sit on the floor, ground, or on an elevated seat if in a more public debate. "Except for some movements of the hand or fingers, the answerer sits still, in rapt attention" (p. 25). When answering, Samdhong Rinpoche (1981) describes the defender placing the ceremonial hat on their head but removing it in respect when quoting a text or scripture.

2. Patterns:

Samdong Rinpoche (1981) argues: "The mechanism of human expression has four levels: physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. I have no hesitation in subscribing to the idea that the traditional Tibetan method of dialectical disputation is the most powerful form of human expression in which the four levels ...are harmoniously blended" (p. 27). So, the debates pattern students' physical awareness, analytical reasoning, emotions, and spiritual states. Physical awareness is cultivated through the complex gestures. The patterning of emotions is educated through the channeling of desire and aggression, which will be dealt with later. Spirituality is addressed through the development of analytical (meditation) skills, which in turn assists students to identify and realize emptiness/interdependence and to develop compassion. Dialectical debate is considered to be a way to help rather than defeat an opponent.

Across human cultures, reason and abstract analysis are used to draw inferences (abstract and conceptual) about relationships between phenomena that are not apparent in ordinary experience, such as causal or classificatory relations. In Tibetan Buddhism, reason and analytical meditation are directed and patterned towards understanding causal relations and classifications of experience or "mind." Accordingly, the formal educational curricular contents (mind sciences, philosophy) and practices (debate,
analytical meditation) focus on the relationships between states of mind, activities, and their effects on our experience. The Western (Enlightenment) approach to reason is patterned differently, towards seeing relations between matter or form. In looking at ourselves, this leads us to attend to, and draw inferences about, relations between our physical activities and environments and the quality of our experience. In Buddhism, attention and inferences are focussed instead on the contents of cognition (thought, feeling, sensations, awareness) as the critical determinant of our experience.

C. Context:

The most significant context to which the debates relate is that of the monastic community, and the need to socialize students into that particular worldview and community to secure their long term commitment and participation (see Dreyfus, 1997).

D. Characteristic activity:

1. As an educational activity:

   a) Daily activities, tasks, and groupings:

   Senior nuns have begun instructing early and late beginner classes (Ngondro and Dusgra) at Dolma Ling, so I will use an exchange from one such class to outline the activity of debate. The instructor and students sit in a circle on the grass, where the instructor engages students singly or as a group, asking them to repeat the dialogue in chorus. Although the process appears to be one of rote memorization, it is in fact to inculcate the patterns of the exchange. Once the debaters are familiar with the language and grammar of the debates, they are freer to select subjects and arguments. Here is a sample exchange between a [nun] teacher and a Ngondro (foundation or beginner) class...
from April of 1998. The teacher is playing the role of defendant to allow the students to rotate playing the role of challenger:

**Student:** ...Then is it a colour if it is a root colour?

**Teacher:** I accept.

**Student:** Posit it.

**Teacher:** Take, for instance, the colour of a white mountain.

**Student:** Is it a colour if it is the colour of a white mountain?

**Teacher:** I accept.

**Student:** Subject being the colour of a white mountain, why is it colour?

**Teacher:** Because it is one of the root colours. [White is a root colour here.]

**Student:** If it is one of the root colours, then does the category of colour pervade that of root colour?

**Teacher:** I accept.

**b) Annual activities and groupings:**

There are annual written and debate examinations in Buddhist philosophy. At Dolma Ling, these were held in late November and December, before the two-month winter and New Year holidays in January and February. The debate examinations were held in public before the entire community of nuns, teachers, staff and invited judges, who are senior scholar monks from the various monasteries in Dharamsala. Every student has an opportunity to serve as both challenger and defender with a randomly selected class peer. The nuns are more shy and restrained under these circumstances than
usual, and may become visibly upset in public competition. In 1997, I witnessed at least three nuns cry during such exams. Some were survivors of imprisonment and torture in Tibet, a group particularly critical of the curriculum’s emphasis on Buddhist philosophy.

In addition, there is the Winter Debate Competition (*h.Jang dgun chos*) and the debates held during *monlam chenpo* after the Tibetan New Year. The Winter Debate Competition is associated with a month-long debate held between the three principal monastic universities (Sera, Ganden, Drepung) and their associated colleges. The four largest debating nunneries in India do the same—three of the nunneries are in the region of Dharamsala and one in South India. The visiting nunneries send a small delegation of their best debaters, who live in the host nunnery for the month-long event. Judge(s) will officiate and decide if points of doctrine or argument are valid or not during such public debates, and in the case of the Monlam Chenpo debate, this is often done by HH the Dalai Lama. On one occasion in 1995, the nuns engaged in a ceremonial debate over which HH the Dalai Lama presided.

c) Longterm activities and groupings:

There are various grades and degrees in the Tibetan monastic education system. The principal advanced degree is the geshe degree, which itself has various standings, the top being geshe larampa. Short of the geshe degree, there are secular/monastic hybrid institutions. The Dialectic School in Dharamsala offers an 8-year program, and Sarnath Tibetan-Sanskrit University offers baccalaureate and masters degrees with debate training in philosophical studies. As yet no nun has received a geshe degree, and the process whereby the first nun could do so is not yet clearly established.
2. **As a socialization activity:**

Dialectical debate acculturates students into a shared narrative or worldview, not just into a set of social and verbal practices. In the Gelugpa case, as Dreyfus (1997) argues, this worldview is dominated by the Buddhist sutra tradition, where dialectical debate has emerged as a pivotal role to co-ordinate and socialize students into the tradition. I consider the socializing activities of dialectical debate under six topics: a) competitive/cooperative; b) peer tutoring; c) apprenticeship and guided participation; d) emotions and sublimation; e) gendering; and f) community-building.

**a) As socialization into competition/cooperation:**

As a pedagogical practice, dialectical debate is simultaneously a highly cooperative and a highly competitive activity. Officially, there are ubiquitous references in the preparatory stages to the need for cooperative rather than competitive motivation in the practice. Geshe Lobsang Tharchin (in Perdue, 1992) prefaces his remarks on the debate practice by stating: “The purpose for debate is not to defeat and embarrass a mistaken opponent, thereby gaining some victory for oneself; rather, the purpose is to help the opponent overcome his wrong view” (p. 9). Samdhong Rinpoche (1981) echoes this view: “While laying down the principles of motivation and conduct, it was well mentioned that the tone of debate should not be such as to elicit pride or exaggerated wisdom in the debater. For this reason, the demonstrations of unqualified humour and a sense of petty pleasures is to be avoided” (p. 23-24). He refers to the Indian Buddhist scholar Chandrakirti’s *Madhyamakavatara*, which teaches, “analysis in treatises is not for the sake of debate, but is meant for attainment of liberation (*vimukti*)” (p. 24).
This doctrine notwithstanding, the debate training can be highly competitive, wherein such competition is not simply tolerated but encouraged for its energy and motivation. Although distinctions of “winners” and “losers” are not ordinarily drawn as in Western debate traditions, except in the case of Tibetan intercollegial competitions, efforts are made to outwit and trick one’s opponent. Furthermore, as now practiced at Dolma Ling, debate performance determines one’s overall grade level and standing in relations to one’s peers, and it is rare and difficult to get permission to be exempted from such studies. The competitive dimension of the debates is considered to be highly motivating and stimulating, and for this reason some degree of competition is tolerated and encouraged.

b. As socializing peer support:

Not only do debates offer an effective, efficient, and coordinated educational activity, but they serve to build and bind community in the process of developing students’ critical thinking skills. Through the debate training, one is continuously reminded of one’s interdependence with peers and the limitations of one’s knowledge through the challenges of another. As Rogoff (1990) argues, “peer interaction may provide children [students] with the chance to practice role relations as well as to observe more skilled partners who are likely to be more available than adults” (p. 185).

c. As socializing through apprenticeship and guided participation:

Whereas for Piaget (1955), learning followed development, for Vygotsky (1978), learning preceded development. Vygotsky distinguished between two developmental levels that coexist in any learner—completed and potential development—and he labelled the difference between the two “the zone of proximal development.” The relevant
pedagogical question is how to make best use of this zone to realize potential development through learning (p. 84-91). The learning of particular relevance to Vygotsky was the internalization of social knowledge through a process Bruner (1983) called “scaffolding.” A scaffold refers to an expert-novice interaction in which the expert plays out the script initially but gradually allows the novice to assume a progressively greater role in the performance of the script.

The term “scaffold” is borrowed from the building trades; it suggests that a novice is constructing a world in which they are later to live. In this respect, the world is something we construct rather than something we discover out there. This construction is accomplished through social supports in the development of language and concepts. As Bakhtin (1981) points out, the word by nature occupies historical time; it is socially and interdependently derived. The appearance of unity in the word is the buttress of authoritarianism, whereas the “dialogization” of words and discourses marks a shift towards democratization, relativization, and the recognition of competing claims for truth (p. 427). “The word in language is half someone else’s. Prior to the moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language, …but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own” (Rogoff, 1990, p. 189). Yet the word is only half someone else’s—the rest is the meaning the speaker ascribes to the word in context.

To represent this active and creative aspect of language socialization, Rogoff (1990) chose to use the term “apprenticeship” or “guided participation” rather than scaffolding. Dialectical debate training offers expert-novice apprenticeship and guided
participation among peers. Even where the peers are equal, their knowledge is not identical. They serve as apprentices to one another in the acquisition of the specialized language and concepts introduced in the debates, and help complexify one another’s processes of thinking by recontextualizing and reconceptualizing (Cazden, 1988) the standardized topics. Of course, the principal source of expert scaffolds come from the debate manuals and teachers through formal lessons. This initiates the learning process and sets the limits of the topics, structure, and grammar of the debates. Like any scaffolded task, the debate teachers and manuals, “make it possible for the novice to participate in the mature task from the very beginning; and they do this by providing support that is both adjustable and temporary” (p. 107). Yet, one has to query as Cazden did, restating Searle’s concerns about scaffolds in education: “Whose building whose building?” (p. 110). After all, highly scaffolded activities involve the transmission of a teacher’s meaning and the acceptance of that meaning by a student. This is a question I return to at the chapter’s end through the voices of the nuns themselves.

Vygotsky used “internalization” to mean a sequence of events whereby “overt social interaction (speaking and listening) becomes transformed into covert mental processes (thinking)” (p. 108). He stipulated that successful internalization does not arise from mechanical or rote activities but from a process of questioning and critical inquiry aimed at understanding rather than answering. In a comparison of learning associated with texts, classes, or peer debates in monastic education, it is the latter that offer sufficient freedom and duration (2-3 hrs/day) for such “overt social action” to become internalized. In the sequencing of questions, the challenger preformulates the topic through an introductory line of questions, and reformulates questions when the
opponent's response appears to be in error. In this respect, the debates serve an important pedagogical site wherein Buddhist philosophy is reconceptualized and recontextualized through dialogue. Dialectical debate stands in marked contradiction to stereotypes about the rote activities of Tibetan Buddhist education and of Asian education in general. The memorizing of debate texts, vocabulary, and exchanges, so readily taken as a sign of authoritarianism, in fact scaffolds students into greater autonomy in analytical reasoning.

**d) As socializing and sublimating emotions:**

One need only witness the riveting energy of a debate courtyard on a single occasion to be convinced that it is far from the decontextualized, cerebral, scholastic activity suggested by its texts. This highly-charged, energetic climate arises from three related sources—the high level of interest and motivation of students, the physicality and gestural complexity, and finally, the emotional dimension of the activity. With regard to the latter, I will focus on two "emotions" central to Tantric meditational practice that I believe are relevant in the debate training—desire and anger. Tibetan monks and nuns live in celibate communities in which rather strict discipline standards of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence are upheld. This creates potential conditions for the pathological repression of both desire and anger as lethargy and/or depression, or for what is sometimes called the "return of the repressed" in deviant sexual or aggressive activities. That there is minimal evidence of these tendencies in Tibetan monasteries is a testament to the combined efficacy of the debate and Tantric meditation traditions, which in Freudian terms could be deemed to facilitate the sublimation rather than repression of energetic tendencies.
The idea of sublimation finds a certain parallel in Tantric Buddhism, which promotes the idea of using what are construed as “negative” emotions to procure positive effects through meditational practices. The debate tradition developed in monastic universities, which existed as veritable cities of men housing thousands of monks in very close proximity. In that context, the debate training became a highly competitive and at times aggressive form of intellectual exchange, where such aggression was accepted as benign and indeed healthy. 27 Today, even formal, adjudicated examinations, physical pushing and shoving are tolerated and even welcomed as acceptable expressions of intellectual sparring. Samdong Rinpoche (1981) suggests expressing feelings through gestures reduces aggression. “Those who are conversant with the methods of Shastratha in an Indian philosophical council [without such gestures] know very well that at the height of one’s debating performance the disputant often becomes vociferous and aggressive due to strained emotions” (p. 24). Such physicality allows feelings to be enacted and expressed in a structured communicative ritual to enhances students’ interest and attention while minimizing the frustration of repressing or “straining” emotions.

Desire also has a role in the debate training, whereby the desire for interpersonal interactions are progressively redirected towards an increasing interest and enthusiasm for studies and analytical reflections. 28 Indeed, this connection lies buried in the etymology of the word “desire,” which shares a common root with the word “to consider.” In extolling the benefits of the debate practice, Ven. Samdong Rinpoche (1981) describes the desire and pleasure in learning that develop in students:

Through debating, monks keep themselves fully alive and jubilant and even the novices and young monks seem to scoff at misery and any amount of hardships in
their lives. The unwary may be astonished to see them always smiling and
casually laughing aloud, though seemingly without sufficient reason, laughter
opens their hearts and keeps them blooming. The monks who have learnt and
practised the art of disputation are not subject to the common tensions, which
afflict most men in modern society. Without weariness they take up vigorous and
intensive study, sometimes without breaks and vacations for a considerable period
of time. (p. 27)
e) As gender-socializing activity:

The emotional dimensions of the debate training suggest more overlap between
Tantric and sutra studies in Gelugpa monasteries than is generally acknowledged (for
example, by Dreyfus, 1997). Most nuns and monks have initiations for Tantric
meditational practices. In particular, Gelugpa monasteries focus on the sequence of male
meditational deity figures (Father Tantra)—Manjusri and Yamantaka, culminating in
Guhyasamaja. The nunneries, on the other hand, focus on female deity meditations
(Mother Tantras), principally Tara (Dolma in Tibetan), Vajrayogini, and Chod. The
Manjusri-Yamantaka series of meditations are connected to the transmutation of anger
and wrathful energy into intelligence and protection for the path. Tara and the female
deities are more concerned with activities of enlightenment and non-clinging awareness.

Having said this, I would point out that all these meditations are practised by people of
any gender, and the Manjusri meditation in particular is emphasized as of benefit to those
engaged in debate training.

At the same time, I found similar gender differences in direct field experience and
observations. One evening at Sera Monastery, for instance, making my way to a special
dinner with the abbot, I walked through a debate courtyard filled with a group of thirty monks debating in pairs and small groups. After our dinner was finished, we returned through the same debate courtyard to find all thirty or so monks now in a single “team” or group surrounding one monk-challenger. The monks circled and challenged him with questions and threatening jeers, moving towards him as they tightened the circle around him. The challenger backed away, shouting his responses as his arms swung and his hands clapped in rapid succession. I looked at his eyes, which bulged uncannily and wildly as if he was in a trance. His words emerged in rapid succession, like weapons. Violence loomed, and I was reminded of a street gang.

This scene was unlike any I had to that point witnessed, in spite of my rather extensive experience observing debates at Dolma Ling, the School of Dialectics, and HH the Dalai Lama’s monastery (the latter two under the omnipresent gaze of Western tourists). The European couple I was with that evening at Sera even expressed concern for the safety of their children, and so we moved on, though I knew such fears were unfounded. It is helpful to understand “aggression” as part of a two-dimensional pattern of human psychophysical “energy,” with one axis ranging from benign and healthy through neutral to harmful expressions, and the other axis from more cognitive through to more physical expression. Although aggression in the debates is “sublimated” and thus not overtly harmful, the aggression can become physical and should not be considered entirely cognitive. It might be analogous to the expression of aggression in some contact sports, except that in the debates it rarely (never to my knowledge) becomes an overt act of violence (as harm) as can happen in sports. The aggression is channelled or redirected towards the language and logic of the argument. Although the aforementioned scene
took place without supervision, even in highly supervised competitions and examinations, pushing, shoving, and overt aggression were tolerated and seemingly even encouraged as an indication of a student’s interest and commitment.

The nuns did not debate in this manner. They exhibited far fewer signs of aggression, though their debates could be equally animated and engaging. If anything, their debates exhibited an aesthetic that might be described more in terms of sublimated desire than aggression or anger. For example, late one afternoon, one of the nuns seemed very excited about her argument, and was smiling in an elated way as she asserted her reasons with vigorous clapping hands. Her opponent retorted. Suddenly the challenger swung around in a twirl, her robes flying in the air as she danced her words, punctuating each sentence with in a clap. After her opponent’s response, she repeated this lovely twirl as she finished her argument. Her body and gestures were testament to her joy and pleasure in the debate, and gave the impression of someone who was certain of the line of argument and where it was going. While her powerful movements—both performed and performative—mirrored the confidence she felt in her reasoning and the pleasure she experienced in demonstrating her opponent’s error, her actions were more like those of an ecstatic dancer than a competitive warrior. Yet, there are instances of competitive and volatile debates in the nunnery, as when one nun screamed out her argument in a high pitch while her face turned red with fury at her opponent’s argument. Likewise, I have witnessed nuns debating to prove their prowess and superiority to an audience (i.e. me), and seemingly taking great pleasure in humiliating and “beating” their opponent in the process. This raises the question of whether the debates always sublimate arrogance and anger or whether they in fact encourage them in certain cases and contexts.
This has led a Tibetan administrator at Dolma Ling to question the adoption of the traditional debate curriculum in the nunnery. She is the daughter of a Nyingma lama, an order that does not use debate much in the education of either nuns or monks. Indeed, she debated me one evening over dinner about gender issues and the practice of debate. She was concerned that the training eliminates some important feminine characteristics, which she believes are equally or more important than assertiveness or critical intelligence. Here are some of her arguments:

...I say we should develop a more feminine and less aggressive form of education than debate for the nuns. I don’t like how they are getting low, gruff voices and beginning to move like men. I prefer gentle qualities in women, like Delek Y. [the disciplinarian], who is gentle yet intelligent and strong at the same time. If the nuns become like men in the end, then what is the point. ...They are becoming very forceful. These days, from the back you can’t tell whether it is a monk or a nun because they all walk and talk the same. It shouldn’t be like that. They should be different, more feminine. We have different bodies than men, so obviously we are different. ... If we lose that, then it is a problem I think. For me, to be feminine is to be more gentle, caring, compassionate, and delicate. The nuns are losing some of those qualities.

Given the system of debate has evolved exclusively in male educational milieus, the question remains whether it is in fact well-suited to the particular pedagogical and psychosocial needs of women. At the same time, it is worth considering why women (that is, nuns) were traditionally excluded from scholastics and formal education. I came across repeated oral accounts of a (probably) apocryphal story about a nunnery having
once existed in Tibet where nuns excelled in debate and defeated all the monks they debated. The monks became jealous, and so decided to trick the nuns by inventing the *yin log/min log*—the “opposite-from-being-something and opposite-from-not-being-something”—debates. These are now part of the Collected Topics texts of the introductory debates. The nuns purportedly became confused by the circular language and logic of these impossibly scholastic debates, and so were defeated by the monks’ trickery. It is said that thereafter the nuns never debated again. Here is one such passage (Perdue, 1992):

> If someone [a hypothetical Defender] accepts the basic consequence, [the Sutra School Challenger responds,] “It follows that the subject, pillar’s isolate, is not opposite from being opposite from not being a permanent phenomenon because of being opposite from not being opposite from not being a permanent phenomenon…

(p. 496)

Were the tale true, debates like this suggest the nuns were better off spared such hair-splitting exercises of dubious logical or intellectual value. Nonetheless, what is interesting is that this apparently apocryphal story has so much oral circulation within Tibetan monastic culture, suggesting either that such a nunnery may have in fact existed, or that the story itself has great motivational or psychological currency for the monastic community. Whatever the reason, it conveys how trickery and mean-spirited competition *can* be an aspect of the debates though *not* a part of official representations found in texts and instruction manuals. Such discrepancies between the stories of oral, lived culture and those of textual or official orthodoxy are intriguing and betray the ability of human beings to live under inconsistent and seemingly conflicting views.
f) **As socialization into community:**

Dreyfus (1997) concluded that differences between the Gelugpa and Nyingma curricula were related to the differing worldviews to which students were being socialized—namely, to a sutra and tantra worldview, respectively. As an important aspect of the Gelugpa curriculum, the debate-as-language game can be understood as a principal means to scaffold students into a particularly worldview that values reason, discipline, and hierarchy. Furthermore, the particular texts, language, gestures, and contents of the debates distinguish the Gelugpa monastic community from both lay people and other lineages. Indeed, such distinctions are even finer at the level of particular colleges, who draw community boundaries on the basis of particular debate manuals.

3. **Debate as integrated cognitive activity:**

According to Buddhism, for a subject to be learned as a stable and valid form of knowing, it must go through the threefold process of hearing, thinking and meditating. “Hearing” includes listening and reading; “thinking” involves any form of dialectical or critical inquiry conducted in words or thought; and “meditating” involves analytical or single-pointed concentration and reflection on a subject. In the debate training, these three are said to combine in a coordinated manner. Samdong Rinpoche (1981) explains that this threefold process is of spiritual, not simply intellectual, import: “One should thus realize that the mind must traverse the stages of hearing, thinking, and meditating—a sequential method of approach to debating. This also explains how Buddhahood is not of a passive nature, but an active form of mind. Dialectical debate is not confined to academicians alone, it is an indispensable factor in the path of spiritual progress” (p. 29).
4. Debate as dialectical (dialogic) activity

Dialogue, dialectics, and dialogical interactions pervade the history of education; the unique aspect of the Tibetan system is that most dialogue is taking place between peers rather than with a teacher. According to Bakhtin (1981), a dialogical structure is implicit in language. He claimed the "word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way. ...The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. ...Such is the situation in any living dialogue" (p. 279-280). This view comes close to explaining the pedagogical value of the debate system, where the responses determine the course of the debate. For Bakhtin, language carries a built-in dialogical responsiveness, or perhaps response-ability, which in the debates is explicit and eventually internalized in patterns of analytical reflection. As Bakhtin explains:

To some extent, primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle: it creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other. (p. 282)

Bakhtin (1981) presents two forms of dialogue: one external between two people and the other internal between an earlier and later self. Jurij Lotman (1977, in Bakhtin) distinguishes these as spatial (A→B) and temporal (A→A') communication acts (p. 428). This helps explain the value of the debate training to the spiritual and interior life of students. After extensive interpersonal communication acts (that is, external dialogues with peers), a student in the Gelugpa monastic education system internalizes the
dialogical process in developing skills in analytical meditation, a process in which conceptual thought is itself the object of meditation. This might be likened to what is referred to as “contemplation” or analytical thinking in the Western tradition. Indeed, the entire discourse of the debate training can itself be understood as the posing of a question to which meditation, both analytical and non-analytical forms, are responses.

E. Antecedent training and learning in which rules are imparted:

Debate rules are imparted through a sequence involving the memorization of debate manuals; chorus chanting of various challenges and responses with an instructor; and debating with partners, where the subjects are kept simple (i.e. colours) to allow students to rehearse the vocabulary, grammar, and logic of the debates. This training has been detailed in earlier sections and chapters.

F. Use of components of the language-game:

The various components of the debate training are combined to facilitate increasingly complex arguments and reasons (explanations).

G. Its point or purpose:

The point or purpose of the Buddhist dialectical debate is explicitly (Perdue, 1992): “to defeat misconceptions, to establish the correct view, and to clear away objections to that view” (p. 6). Some other implicit points or purposes of the training in reason and debate are:

a) Create a community with a shared worldview through distinctive texts and languages (for example, sutra worldview for Gelugpa students).
b) Develop skills in critical reasoning, questioning, and discriminating intelligence.

c) Learn to engage in analytical meditation.

d) Learn to sublimate aggression and lust in such a way that they become instruments, rather than hindrances, to enlightenment.

e) Preserve Buddha Dharma.

f) Instill confidence in students.

V. Debating dialectics: The views of the nuns of Dolma Ling

For the nuns of Dolma Ling, their ability to engage and master the traditional debate program is a sign of their success in at least two culturally meaningful arenas: 1) as ordained members of the monastic community, they are learning to master the traditional sign of scholarship and intelligence in Tibetan society; and, 2) as cultural nationalists, they are participating in the preservation of this important signifier of Tibetan cultural difference. Furthermore, for some, especially the most successful debaters, I detected a nascent but growing sense of confidence in their abilities as women. When a Canadian-Tibetan doctoral student presented her research on the status of women in Tibetan society at Dolma Ling, the nuns responded with questions for over an hour and a half. They varied in their views from believing women inferior to men to an opening to the possibility, at any rate, of their equality. Many expressed the opinion that the emotions of women (e.g. crying and fear) were a sign of their inferiority. While we pointed out these could also be signs of compassion, and that HH the Dalai Lama
cries during large public gatherings, some seemed unconvinced and continued to subscribe to the view that rationality rather than emotional sensitivity was a sign of gender superiority. So, with more training in critical reasoning through dialectics, the nuns' confidence in their personal abilities and those of women in general may increase.

At the same time, there are strong undercurrents of resistance against the debate program from those nuns from Utsang who were survivors of imprisonment and torture in Tibet, and whose nationalist allegiances were not always complementary with their Buddhist ones. Indeed, in interviews with these nuns, what concerned them most was the content of the scholarly program. Some felt the entire curriculum needed a more nationalistic focus on political studies and activism to further the cause of Tibetan independence. Others were more concerned with what they saw as an inflexible opposition to personalized courses of study, and expressed the desire for more freedom to study Tibetan content areas such as Tibetan medicine, history and language. Then, a few of the top debaters expressed the wish to study Buddhist philosophy and debate exclusively, as is the tradition in Tibet and South India. While there are many nuns who are highly committed and successful Buddhist scholars, some are not able to progress well in the debate system. Still others are more motivated to serve than to study. The average age of the nuns in 1998 was somewhere in their mid- to late-twenties; it is understandable some might wish to work instead of maintaining a rigorous study regime whose duration runs 15-20 years to full fruition (that is, to receiving a geshe degree).

It was at the instigation of the Principal of Dolma Ling that a very unusual debate occurred at Dolma Ling in May of 1998. When I had formally interviewed the nuns, I found their responses guarded or altered to suit Western audiences. Now there was to be
a debate on debate. Furthermore, they were to use a Western debate format, which would give me an indication of their understanding of Western modes of discourse and inquiry.

Six nuns were selected by their peers to represent their cohort groups ("houses") in the debate. Three were for and three against the motion, which was "the study of debate is beneficial." The speakers were not the most intellectual of the nuns, but were evidently selected for diverse reasons. The nun voted by judges to have "won" was a nun "against" the motion, whom I here call Dolma Dechen. She was not included in the earlier interviews, but nonetheless had a very high profile at Dolma Ling as a former political prisoner. She had spent three years in prison where she was badly beaten. After coming to Dolma Ling, she had been very eager and willing to bear witness about her experiences and suffering in Tibet to the press and researchers who frequented the nunnery in pursuit of stories. I found her to be very determined, strong, and resolute in manner. On one occasion, while being interviewed by BBC, she showed a remarkably clear composure and steady voice and disposition as she told the crew and cameras her views and experiences of the occupation of Tibet. Here are the texts of those debates, translated from the original Tibetan by the Principal, Pema Tsewang Shastri. There are three arguments against the motion and two for; one "for" argument was excluded as it was inaudible. The nuns’ names are changed, and I include their texts in their entirety and in their own (translated) words so that you can hear their views, unmediated. All the nuns and staff were assembled for the debate. After each speaker, the opponents posed questions, as did the audience and spectators at the very end.
1st Speaker: Khandro Delek (speaking for the motion)

The motion for today’s debate is the “the study of debate is beneficial,” and I would like to put forth my arguments before the most respected chairman, panel of judges, teachers, and my friends in Dharma. Also, I would like to express my greetings to you all on behalf of my house.

I would like to speak for the motion as it is clear from the fact that the very topic says the study of debate is beneficial. We study the five major fields of study here, as well as the study of logic. Unless one studies all the five major sciences, it is very difficult to make oneself enlightened. As it is said in the sutra, “If a Bodhisattva does not learn the essence of the five sciences, the goal of enlightenment is hard to achieve.” On the other hand, Sakya Pundit Kunga Gyaltsen has said that, “If your mind is not trained on the knowledge of all phenomena, then the all-knowing persona remains as far away as the sky. It is therefore the duty of all Bodhisattvas and their sons to possess the knowledge of all phenomena.”

In case someone intends to quote the great ascetic Milarepa, who said that the study of debate is not necessary to achieve enlightenment, then my quote from Sakya Pundit is more than enough reason to rebut their argument. If someone argues that “the study of debate is a lengthy process and takes a long time to reap the fruit of it; therefore, it is wiser to spend the extra time on the study of secular subjects like English, Science, and History, etc.. Moreover, we do not see many people—those who have studied debate—serving our community.” To them I would say that when a person is able to solve a complicated problem, then it makes it much easier to solve the small problems. Furthermore, we have at present person like Ven. Samdong Rinpoche, Mr. Kalsang
Yeshi, and Kalon Sonam Topgyal serving the community in their different capacities, and they have all been educated in the dialectical debate curriculum.

It is, therefore, very important to know the nature, form, and definition of a phenomenon. For instance, even if one is to manufacture a match box, one has not only to know how to manufacture it but to know the very nature, form, definition, and use of all the raw materials used to manufacture it. The other practical way of finding out the usefulness of the study of debate is to consider two students, one who has studied debate and the other hasn't. Even if both students have the same grade, intelligence, and perseverance levels, the former will have the greater capacity to understand the matter logically.

The other benefit to studying debate is that those who have studied it have the advantage of knowing a thing more intrinsically and comprehensively, whereas those who have not studied the debate would know a thing only superficially, even if it is a matter of terminology. Those who have studied debate can also teach, argue, and write in a perfect manner. It was only by the virtue of logic that Chandrakirti and Nagarjuna defeated the Brahmin fanatics.

The other benefit of knowing how to debate is that one can understand the subtle thoughts and interpretations of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas with a discriminating wisdom which can ultimately be used for distinguishing things right and wrong. By this you can not only plant a seed of merit in yourself, but also in the minds of others. Therefore, the study of debate not only benefits this life but your future lives as well.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama, during the first inter-nunnery debate session in Dharamsala, said that, “a person who has studied logic has much more understanding
and grasp of the scripture than another who has not studied logic.” Similarly, today I also would like to conclude my talk by saying that the study of debate is beneficial to us. Thank you.

**Question:** Why didn’t Kalsang Yeshi and Sonam Topgyal teach debate in our community?

**Answer:** *At first they both studied debate, but later on they chose not to stay as monks and stopped practicing what they knew before.*

**Question:** You said that even to manufacture a matchbox one needs logic and inferences. Then, why can’t present-day Tibetan geshes manufacture a matchbox?

**Answer:** *That is why I said before that we need to study debate, in order to know what causes and conditions are necessary to manufacture a matchbox.*

**Question:** My perception of the term debate here refers to a unique form of hands, feet, and bodily gestures introduced by the Gelugpa school. But you did not talk on this, why is that so?

**Answer:** *My perception or understanding of the motion is different from yours; therefore, I tried to explain it in my own way. According to a Tibetan dictionary, the term “mTsen-nyid” refers to the definition or identity of a phenomenon, and I have tried to put forward my argument on the basis of that understanding.*

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**2nd Speaker: Choedron Zomkyi** (speaking *against* the motion)

Most respected Mr. Chairman, learned panel of judges, my worthy opponents, respected staff-members, and all my friends in Dharma! First of all I would like to express my sincere greetings to you all. Today, I stand here to speak against the motion.
Though I have as many reasons as there are stars in the sky to prove that there is no benefit to the study of debate, I would like to put forth a few of them according to the limits of allotted time.

We all know that there have been thousands and thousands of people who have studied debate in the past and are studying in the present too. Unfortunately, we find very few of these people who benefit our community in a practical way through their knowledge of debate. From our own experience, we all are aware how difficult it was and is to find a debate teacher for Dolma Ling. [Laughing.] We all know this, don’t we? The fact is that this difficulty in getting a good debate teacher in our community is a very clear indication of the disadvantages attached to the study of debate.

Now, take for instance the three great seats of Gelugpas [monasteries] in South India. There are thousands and thousands of monks who study debate in these monasteries, but the fact remains that we find only a handful of geshes out of this large population of monks. These few geshes that we have produced rarely benefit the Tibetan society. They would rather choose to immigrate to the West for their own benefit—I mean material benefit. So, it is very clear that the Tibetan community does not reap the fruits of those trees that have been planted with some expectations! It is also very rare to find individuals who put into practice what they have studied. We rarely find any serious practitioners among this large sea of monks in the community.

My opponents might say that the very purpose of studying debate is to quicken the achievement of Nirvana. If that is so, then my question would be, “Do those monks who study at the three great seats achieve Nirvana much quicker than those who do not study
debate? From my observation, the fact is that there is no difference between the two. Is there? No way.

Others might say that the study of debate develops one's intelligence, but then does the mere development of one's intelligence contribute to the achievement of quick Nirvana? No. It can only contribute to making a quick buck! [Laughter].

My other point is that human life is very short—similar to the time it takes for a cat to yawn. Accordingly, the time taken to study debate is too long. Time is very precious to human beings, and if we waste this precious time just to study the process of debate, then I think it is very foolish to do that. Instead, if we were to utilize this time instead to learn other secular subjects like English, Science, and Mathematics, then within a short period of time we would be able to utilize our energies towards the service of our community. And that service not only helps others but fulfills one's own aspirations. So, I would, without any doubt, say that too much time and human resources are wasted in those three great seats.

Similarly, my belief is that the study of debate might help a person to become eloquent, but then such people are the one's who stir and disturb the peace and stability of a community. And this is very clear from the past and present situations in our own society. These days, everyone talks about the misbehaviour of monks and nuns in our society. So, do you think this is a benefit of the study of debate? Rather we should use our time in studying other related and useful modern subjects. If you still persist in the study of debate, then you will be left with nothing useful in your life. As the saying goes, "You can't collect the dung from the other side of the river when you have the basket on
this side of the river, and in the process you will lose the basket belt.” Thank you very much.

**Question:** You said that there are few individuals who have studied debate serving our community. My question is: Are not our monk teachers here doing service to the community?

**Answer:** I did not say that there are none. I said rarely. One or two individuals are there, but that is not the whole point of debate. Exceptions are always there and we have to accept that.

**Question:** Don’t you think that the six ornaments and two jewels and Tsongkhapa and his two disciples have achieved their Nirvana owing to their study of debates?

**Answer:** As I said before, they are exceptions. My argument is about the present day huge community of monks in the south.

**Question:** Don’t you think that the present day pervasiveness of Buddhism in Tibet is because of the contribution made by the study of debate?

**Answer:** I would say a big NO. Buddhism is a very large field of study, an ocean, and the study of debate is just a small drop in that large ocean. Therefore, its contribution towards the spread of Buddhism in Tibet is less than negligible.

**3rd Speaker: Dolma Dechen** (speaking against the motion) [Introduction as before.]

...Even before the Chinese occupation of Tibet, there were thousands of monks who studied debate. Yet, they were all one-sided and quite ignorant of other secular subjects like language and literature. Many of the monks did not know how to write their names properly. They all studied only Buddhist philosophy and did not care to study other
relevant and modern subjects like history, geography, political science, and language, etc. For instance, almost all the geshes were very good at speaking, but when they were asked to write down what they said, then they invariably put their fingers in their mouths and the world stopped there for them. That is the reason why we lost our country and freedom.

To give you another example, in 1959 when His Holiness took asylum in India and thousands of Tibetans, including a large number of geshes, followed him into exile, His Holiness gathered all the geshes together to re-train them once again in the knowledge and skills of this modern world. And what was said was a matter of great concern and surprise. After spending all those thirty or forty years, in a way their whole lives, in the study of Buddhist philosophy, it did not serve any useful purpose, because we had to re-train them once again. I consider this an enormous waste of human and material resources on the part of Tibet.

If the monks had studied other secular subjects such as foreign languages, history, politics, and social sciences, instead of spending thirty or forty years in the study of debate, then they would have brought about the necessary changes to suit the times and circumstances, and I have no doubt at all that our country would not have been lost. In the present world those persons who have spent thirty to forty years of their lives in study are the ones who lead the people and shape the destiny of their countries. The intellectual community of a country is the group that protects the sovereignty of the country. This fact is very clear in the world and even in the Tibetan exile government. Those who serve in the exile government are mostly college graduates and not geshes. How many geshes do we see in the Tibetan bureaucracy? All the secretaries and members of the
parliament in exile are non-geshes. All these people are the ones who received modern
education after 1959, not the geshes that the monasteries have produced.

The second argument that I want to put forth is that studying the debate gives rise
to the weakening of a country’s political status. Those who studied debate had been so
fundamentalist and hard-headed that they did not bring the timely and necessary changes
in Tibet before the Chinese takeover. It was under the pressure of the monastic
community that the only secular school in Lhasa was shut down. So, Tibet as a country
wasted its human and material resources on the study of so-called debate. That was the
reason why the Chinese found it very easy to occupy our country. If the reforms were
introduced on time, the present history of Tibet would have been very different.

Even as late as the 1930’s, HH the Thirteenth Dalai Lama tried to bring some
changes to Tibet, but the geshes, along with the monks of the three great monasteries [in
their original Tibetan locations] created many obstacles on the way such that the reforms
could not be introduced. If only the Tibetans had made good relations with the other
nations of the world, if only Tibetans had realized the importance of opening their mental
horizons further, if only the Tibetans were less superstitious, then the Chinese would not
have intruded into Tibet. And all this happened because of our excessive attachment to
the study of debate.

The third reason I put forth is that in the Abhidharma Kosh it is said that the world
is flat, and our geshes have blindly believed this without giving any thought to the
scientific proof and evidence to the contrary. Now, when we study science, we all learn
that the world is not flat at all. And it is on this basis that our critics condemn Buddhism.
Rather than refuting these critics, our geshes always remain lost in their own world,
which is a matter of concern to all of us. This is also due to the excessive emphasis on the study of debate. Thank you.

**Question:** Can you explain how the study of debate led to the loss of our country? I, for one, believe that we lost our country owing to the indulgences of aristocrats.

**Answer:** Well, the aristocrats were fewer in number compared to geshes at that time. I believe education is the cornerstone for the development of a country and that the monasteries in Tibet were the only educational institutions of the society at that time. Therefore, the products of these institutions are to blame and not a few aristocrats.

**Question:** I think the political responsibility rested with the aristocratic families and the religious responsibility with the geshes at that time.

**Answer:** You are absolutely wrong. Ours was a theocratic government at that time. Even now it is a combination of a religious and political body. Ours is not a secular government. So, the geshes must share equal responsibility as others do. If the geshes had done their duty well, then there is no reason why we should have lost both our religious and political freedom. If what you say is true, then there should be religious freedom in Tibet now, but that is not the case.

**Question:** Why has HH the Dalai Lama always stressed the study of debate in our society? Do you think either he is telling lies or duping the public?

**Answer:** Whatever His Holiness tells us should not be taken at face value. The fact is that right now our country is in the hands of the Chinese and only we have to free it by whatever means possible. How can you convince me that by studying debate exclusively we can get back our country? The study of debate does not become a nuclear missile fired at the Chinese. Take, for instance, the judges of today’s debate. None of
them have studied debate but all of them possess the ability to judge our competence. So, it is very clear that one does not need to have debate training to be able to serve society.

4th Speaker: Chotso Osel (speaking for the motion) [Introduction as before.]

...I would like to put forth my argument with the conviction that the study of debate is imperative, especially at the time and circumstances when people do not believe what others say unless it has been either proved scientifically or by established fact. Etymologically, the term “mTsen-nyid” refers to the very definition or real meaning of a phenomenon.

Gautama Buddha achieved enlightenment after understanding the Four Noble Truths. In order to comprehend the real meaning of the Four Noble Truths, one has to know the definition or the true meaning of all phenomena. In order to know the true meaning of all phenomena, the study of debate is a prerequisite. When one knows that the Buddha is an enlightenment individual, who is omniscient and omnipresent, then one generates a firm belief in him and in the Triple Gem [the three source of refuge, the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha].

Je Tsongkhapa has said that every aspect of the Buddhist path is included in the study of Prajnaparamita sutra [Perfection of Wisdom sutra], and to know the depth of Prajnaparamita one has to have the requisite knowledge and skill in debate. Therefore, in order to have a complete understanding of Buddhism, one needs to study the complexity of the debate system. Those who interpret debate as simply a means to defeat one’s opponent are very silly. If someone says that the Buddha and Milarepa achieved
enlightenment without studying debate, then I would consider that person as most ignorant.

Even in our daily life, we can very easily differentiate the people who have studied debate from those who have not. A person who has studied debate is more eloquent and broadminded, whereas the one who has not studied debate is more ineffective in speaking and narrow-minded. So, in brief, I would say that the study of debate is very beneficial to all of us. Thank you.

Question: Leaving aside the benefits of enlightenment and Nirvana, many people in this world are suffering from hunger and disease, etc. So, what is the practical benefit of studying debate in order to eliminate these real problems of the world.

Answer: I did not say that one will immediately achieve enlightenment after studying debate. Just as one climbs the first step of a staircase to get to the top, so one must study debate to know the real meaning of all phenomena.

Question: What you said was that in order to know the right conscience one needs to learn debate, but I don’t think that you have to know debate in order to distinguish right from wrong. It is a matter of using one’s common sense. What is your view?

Answer: My explanation of debate referred to the absolute truth, whereas your understanding of debate seems to be the conventional truth. This, I think, was the difference. For example, if your mother might tell you to say, “I go for refuge to the Lama,” but when someone asks her the real meaning of that, I’m sure she won’t know. So, there is a deficiency of knowing exactly what is meant by the above refuge phrase.

Question: You just said it is necessary to study debate to go for refuge. Does that mean the lay people here do not generate real refuge because they didn’t study debate?
Answer: What I said was something else, and what you heard was something very different. So, there was this communication gap again. What I said was that the level of understanding between the two will be different. The level of understanding of a thing to a person would be much better if he or she has studied debate.

5th Speaker: Choedron Kharchen (speaking against the motion)

Respected Mr. Chairman, learned panel of judges, my opponents and members on the floor, today I stand here to speak against the motion. Before I start my arguments, I would like to take this opportunity to express my greetings to you all on behalf of my house.

My first argument is that when we debate during our debate sessions, we mostly debate on whether white is a colour or not, and I do not see any reason in it. Leaving aside blind people, even a herder or shepherd knows this about many varieties of colours. Now, if you respond to your opponent that all colours are white, then it only triggers more debate between the two. Other than that, there is no benefit.

Some people debate on whether there is a horn on a hare's head or not. I think instead of debating on whether there is a horn on a hare's head or not, it would be much better if you debated on whether there is a horn on one's own head or not! Even little babies know that there is no horn on a human head. So, instead of wasting our precious time in the pursuit of a rainbow, I think it is far better to spend our time on something useful and concrete, such as doing something beneficial for the cause of Tibet.

Others would say that it is imperative to study debate in order to comprehend the real meaning of all the sutras and commentaries. I do not accept this proposition
because we all know that the great ascetic, Milarepa, achieved enlightenment not
because he had studied debate but because he was committed to what he aimed at. So, I
do not see any valid reason that to be enlightened one needs to study debate. The books
written by Milarepa and all that he said are treated as valid and true expositions by all
the learned Tibetans, irrespective of one’s sect or lineage. Another thing is that we do
not see any concrete and practical fruit of studying debate. Even an attorney at law can
show us the result of his argument, either by winning the case or losing it.

Moreover, some of the terms and phrases that we use while debating are all
Greek to lay people with no value to our practical life. What I would say is that the
tradition of debate was introduced in order to defeat non-Buddhists, yet today we do not
have even a single individual to defeat. Then, why do we waste our time on something
that is not useful at all?

The responsibility of all Buddhists is hearing, thinking and meditating on all that
was taught by the Buddha. To put it succinctly, I would say that our responsibility is first
to try to learn what the Buddha said and then to put that into practice in our daily life.
We do not have to defeat anyone except for our internal enemy, which is ignorance.
Therefore, I would say that the study of debate is not beneficial but rather a waste of
time. Thank you.

**Question:** Do you agree that in order to achieve enlightenment, it is imperative to
integrate both the wisdom and practice? If you agree, then explain how to integrate them
without studying debate?
Answer: I do not think that it is necessary to study debate in order to integrate wisdom and practice. If that is so, then Milarepa would not have achieved his enlightenment.

Question: Do you mean to suggest that Milarepa did study debate? If so, could you tell me the name of the treatise in which it was indicated?

Answer: My interpretation of “debate” in the sense of wisdom would be as an understanding of the very nature of a phenomenon; unless one knows the very nature of all phenomena, one cannot gain enlightenment.

Question: You just said that the very nature of a phenomenon is referred to as “debate.” Then I think modern scientists also know the very nature of all phenomena. So, does that mean that these scientists also know debate from your point of view?

Answer: Yes, I firmly believe that scientists have also studied debate in this sense.

Question: You just said that the study of debate is similar to having eyes. So, do you think that those who do not study debate do not have eyes? Are they all blind?

Answer: No, they are not all blind, but half blind.

Question: You gave so many reasons arguing that the study of debate is not beneficial, but then why do you study debate in Dolma Ling?

Answer: I do not actually want to study debate, but it is the curriculum of Dolma Ling and there is no choice. As the saying goes, “while in Rome, do as Romans do.” Therefore, as one of the students myself, I have to do what others do here.

Chairman’s remarks: Now, while the judges are tallying their scores, I would like to open the arena for the audience. If anyone from the audience have thoughts or ideas,
either for or against motion, you are welcome to use the podium. If anyone has any question for a particular contestant, she can ask without any hesitation.

(Audience) Question: I have a question for Dolma Dechen. You said that Tibet was lost because the monks and nuns remained confused by studying debate. Out of six million Tibetans, the percentage of monks and nuns at the time was not more than 25%. So, if the nuns and monks were confused by debate, then what confused the other 75% of the population?

Answer: The answer is simple. The 25% were the intellectual community and the 75% were mostly illiterates. As I said before, the progress and development of a country depends on the human resource of that particular country. In Tibet's case, it was the clergy who led and guided the country. We gave them (monks and nuns) the opportunity to study, but unfortunately, they did not make proper use of that opportunity.

Question: Dolma Dechen has said that Tibet did not get a seat at the UN because it wasted its time in studying debate. I want to know whether this reference was from an authoritative work or was it simply your belief?

Answer: All the Tibetan people do respect monks and nuns as they represent one of the Three Jewels of refuge. To be worthy of this respect is the responsibility of all the monks and nuns. They did not live up to the expectations of the general Tibetan public, and so things turned upside down. I hope you understand what I meant.

Question: My question is to Choedron Kharchen. You said that it is better to see whether or not we have horns on our head than to see whether or not there is a horn on a hare's head. Historically, we believe that King Langdharma had horns on his head, so
what is the surprise even if we find that we have horns on our head? [King Langdharma is a nefarious figure from the 9th century, infamous for conspiring to rid Tibet of Buddhism. He was murdered by a monk.]

**Answer:** You seem to have misheard what I said. What I said was that even little babies know that we do not have horns on our head.

**Question:** Dechen-la just said that we lost Tibet because of useless geshes. What I feel is that the aristocrats were responsible for that. My question is that to which group would you include the general population?

**Answer:** The general population did what His Holiness told them to do, but the advisors to His Holiness were geshes and aristocrats who did not have the modern farsighted outlook and knowledge of world politics.

**Question:** I do not agree with Dechen-la's contention that we lost our country in Tibet because of the study of debate. I think that China is a big country with a large population, and that is why she easily occupied Tibet.

**Answer:** If that was the case, then tell me why China could not forcibly occupy Nepal and Bhutan? These two countries are much smaller than Tibet in terms of area and population. So, you tell me why China could not occupy these two countries?

Several more points should be added to these thoughtful criticisms and reflections. First, this debate was initiated by the Principal of Dolma Ling, Gen. Pema Tsewang Shastri, who was himself trained at the hybrid Sarnath Tibetan-Sanskrit University, which was developed and administered for many years by the Ven. Samdhong Rinpoche. Under his guidance, this institution has been committed to creatively combining (Western) secular education with traditional Buddhist monastic and
Hindu Sanskrit systems (for which Sarnath is famous). Indeed, at least one of the two judges of the debate was a fellow-graduate of Sarnath. After graduating from Sarnath, Pema Tsewang Shastri was the Principal of a Tibetan Children’s Village grade school in Kulu-Manali with a “modern” secular curriculum, until accepting a Fulbright Scholarship to the Harvard School of Education in Boston. So, his interest in overseeing this cultural conversation within Dolma Ling, through such events as a Western-style debate, is in part the result of his own interests and unusual educational and professional experience.

Second, these debates, while Western in format, testify to the value of the nuns’ previous Buddhist dialectical debate training. Although their debate system bears little resemblance to the Western model, it nonetheless equipped them with the skills needed to function ably within the unfamiliar Western debate format. Some of these skills are logical reasoning, the ability to organize thoughts and arguments, and confidence articulating critical perspectives in public. Indeed, their training in critical reasoning helped them recognize the limitations of Western debate procedures, in spite of their limited experience with the system. For instance, Dolma Dechen, who argued against and “won” pointed out that her expressed position was much more extreme than her actual point of view. The Western debate format forced her to argue exclusively against the motion, while her view was in fact considerably more moderate.

So, it is important not to take these debates as indicative of the actual views of the nuns. The structure of the Western debates skewed them to assuming more polarized viewpoints than they held, while their actual views were in fact more moderate. Knowing the nuns involved, I would say that in most cases they did hold the pro or con position they argued, just not to the extremes encouraged by the rhetorical format of the
Western debate. Were this debate tied to decision-making, it would have led to more extreme measures—either/or propositions—with less compromise than would be warranted. This is an interesting way to understand some of the accentuated conflicts we find in democratic contexts based on this adversarial model of debate. Also, as Isaacs (1999) argues, organizations have tended to adopt this debate model rather than a dialectic or dialogue model, and have found significant conflicts and alienation tend to be the effects. Nonetheless, it did allow a critical discussion of the curriculum and education system that would have been difficult if not impossible using the Tibetan model.

The second point I would like to raise is a question the nuns themselves indirectly pose, and that is why Tibetan monastic debate students’ critical thinking skills are not adapted to address Tibet’s contemporary problems, circumstances and opponents. To contradict one of the nuns who claimed Tibetan Buddhism no longer has any opponents, I would contend that they have many but simply don’t recognize or acknowledge them as such. The cause of this oversight is a bias rooted in the contents of their texts and debates, which leads students to identify opponents in historical intellectual movements rather than in similar arguments waged by contemporaries. Some of the views they contest in their debates, for instance, are those held today by Western scientists and philosophers, such as fundamental atoms and essential “beingness,” whose premises resemble arguments made in Science and Phenomenology, respectively. Furthermore, although the Sino-Tibetan conflict is not predominantly ideological but economic and imperialistic, it seems worthwhile to consider some of the points of difference and compatibility between Marxism and Buddhism. This could help Tibetans better understand their adversary, and thereby improve grounds both for possible
communications and negotiations. So, I would claim that it is not that the debate system
is unable to offer potential benefits in addressing some of challenges currently facing
Tibet, but rather that it shows few signs of doing so. With a few exceptions, geshes do
not continue on to post-graduate studies in Western philosophy or science.

Questioning this neglect has led me to query what makes a rational system like the
dialectical debate program (or science or philosophy) open or closed to the continuous
changes in students’ social and personal contexts. Any rationalized system of knowledge
is founded on a specialized vocabulary and, to some extent, grammar, which students
must acquire in order to engage in conversations within its domain. The more ritualized
and scaffolded the system, even if pedagogically effective, the greater the tendency for
students’ conversations to become circumscribed by historical rather than contemporary
conversational contexts. The specialized lexicon and grammar delimit not just the form
of the resulting conversations but their contents. Initially, such “rationalized” systems
appear to function openly, but as they become institutionalized, their conventions and
habits narrow the possible experiences considered within their domain. Some
experiences are welcomed while others are neglected, discouraged, or even shunned. In
the wake of this narrowing field of experience, there emerges not only a circumscribed
worldview, but a particular culture and way of living in the world. As such habits
become established, their languages, rituals and conversational patterns become
entrenched, and can come to assume greater importance than the experiences and needs
of the participants they were designed to address. As experiences become marginalized,
so do the forms of discourse designed to more directly communicate experiences, such as
narratives, songs, and poetry.
So, to conduct an inquiry into the question of experience, we should meander beyond the logical conversations of the courtyards of Dolma Ling, to discover what might lie beyond their borders. To do so, we cross monastic grounds, passing by grazing cows and new flowerbeds to arrive at the nunnery gates, where we take time to glance back. The nuns are still debating, lining the gentle grass slopes up to the rose garden and walls of the nunnery, clapping hands and shouting, so absorbed in their conversations they don’t notice our departure. We turn and leave, taking a path down a winding road, past large black water buffaloes pulling plows, through grasslands and across a stream, to where wheat fields give way to Indian women tending crops. This is the Kangra Valley, considered one of ten (best-kept) secret abodes of the Tantric deity Heruka, and a most efficacious location to reflect on meditation and direct experience...

Notes:

1 Bhadda Kundalakesa’s life and poem is one of many autobiographical poetic accounts of the women contemporaries of the Buddha to be found in the *Therigatha*, on which Murcott (1991) bases her text. Bhadda is said to have killed her fiancé, a former criminal, when he tried to murder her. For this, she left her family and became a wandering Jain nun before becoming the only female disciple and nun to have received spontaneous ordination from the Buddha. I find her life story inspiring for her fortitude, suffering, courage, independence, and intelligence, and because she was one of the few nuns who continued to keep the wandering life after her ordination.

2 I am struck by the images of Indian scholars and teachers decorating the throne enclosure on the ground level of HH the Dalai Lama’s temple in Dharamsala (see pg. 82), especially when HH the Dalai Lama sits on this throne in front of these portraits, wearing the same type of hat as the Indian scholars, accentuating the strong links between Indian and Tibetan Buddhism.

3 van der Kuijp, L. (1986), in an attempt to correct some of Jackson’s (1982) earlier claims, points out that in Sakya Pandita, one principal source for the account of the Bsam yas debate, no explicit mention is made of Hwa Shang Buddhism, which is a form of Chinese Buddhism that focusses on the experience of totality. The similarity between Hoshang’s name and “Hwa Shang” has no doubt contributed to the connection.

4 Kamalasila articulated his views in “The Three Stages of Meditation” (*sGom rim sum*). What he argues is that the ultimate goal of Buddhism is Buddhahood, and that such a state is founded on wisdom and great compassion. Of the two, the most important is wisdom. To cultivate wisdom, one requires both calm abiding (*samatha*) and special insight (*vipassana*). Both are equally important; ignorance cannot be removed without special insight, and the concentration to sustain such insight requires calm abiding. Stilling discursive thoughts is necessary for calm abiding, while thinking as analytical meditation and reflection is needed for special insight. (Samdong Rinpoche, 1981a, p. 28).
the preliminary classes, and I include their interactions of this class later in the chapter. Because so much
who can serve as role models and teach higher level classes, but at the lower levels it is not uncommon for
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engaged. There are no formal criteria or credentials for debate teachers, short of the ability to lead students
any nation in the world by the turn of this century.
philosophical texts over the centuries; indeed, I have heard it said that they had more texts per capita than
Tibet has managed to amass a prodigious number of
as is the tendency in Western and Western influenced curricula. Only the most senior and accomplished of
learn to write. A former monk who left Sera monastery in the 1960's and who now lives in Canada
of the loss of full ordination is serious in many respects. Technically, for a country to be a "land where
Buddhism thrives," it is considered necessary to have fully ordained monks and nuns, as well as the
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lineage, and must be demonstrated to have an unbroken continuum leading back to the
Buddha. Such lineages are extant in the world, but the conservative Tibetan monastic (that is, monk)
establishment insists on demonstrating such continuity before acknowledging their legitimacy. The effect
of the loss of full ordination is serious in many respects. Technically, for a country to be a "land where
Buddhism thrives," it is considered necessary to have fully ordained monks and nuns, as well as the
novitiate and lay practitioners. Furthermore, the lay Tibetan community tends to believe that monies given
either for entertainment or to practice their tantric arts in secrecy. So, perhaps women did make their way
into Nalanda, just not by way of the front gates!
Tibetan nuns only have access to novice ordination within their own tradition or system. The ordination
lineage is a vinaya lineage, and must be demonstrated to have an unbroken continuum leading back to the
Buddha. Such lineages are extant in the world, but the conservative Tibetan monastic (that is, monk)
establishment insists on demonstrating such continuity before acknowledging their legitimacy. The effect
of the loss of full ordination is serious in many respects. Technically, for a country to be a "land where
Buddhism thrives," it is considered necessary to have fully ordained monks and nuns, as well as the
novitiate and lay practitioners. Furthermore, the lay Tibetan community tends to believe that monies given
to male monastic communities for blessings are more powerful than to female monastic communities
because the full ordination of monks suggests better karmic benefits.
The Tibetan monastic curriculum emphasizes reading over writing. Indeed, traditionally monks did not
learn to write. A former monk who left Sera monastery in the 1960's and who now lives in Canada
recounted to me learning to write in Tibetan against the censure of other monks. It was felt that it was
sufficient to read not write. Oral recitation and debate were used to learn new material rather than writing,
as is the tendency in Western and Western influenced curricula. Only the most senior and accomplished of
geshes and lamas wrote texts. Nonetheless, Tibet has managed to amass a prodigious number of
philosophical texts over the centuries; indeed, I have heard it said that they had more texts per capita than
any nation in the world by the turn of this century.
A qualified instructor could be anyone who has completed the grade or series of debates in which one is
engaged. There are no formal criteria or credentials for debate teachers, short of the ability to lead students
through the logic and language of the debates. There is some advantage to having classes with full geshes
who can serve as role models and teach higher level classes, but at the lower levels it is not uncommon for
students themselves to teach lower grades. Several of the top debating nuns at Dolma Ling were teaching
the preliminary classes, and I include their interactions of this class later in the chapter. Because so much
of the debate tradition relies on texts and peer learning, the instructors' roles are for the most part to
introduce the patterns in practice. Yet, on a more significant level perhaps, they serve as figures of respect
and emulation that inspire discipline and motivation in students by their mere presence in the class or in the
debate courtyard. Accordingly, the higher the degree and status of the teacher, the more they are able to
inspire such emulation. Peers could not do so to the same degree.

16 I use the term “epistemology” loosely, for in Buddhism epistemology cannot be readily distinguished
from ontology. The Buddha did not develop a formal system of grammar, logic and validity explicitly, but
later Buddhist thinkers did so.

17 The principal Indian scholars who formulated Buddhist logic were Dignaga (circa C.E. 480-540) and
Dharmakirti (circa C.E. 600-660).

18 The definitions, divisions and illustrations come from the Namgyal Monastery (1992), pp. 1-4. Thanks
to S. Piburn of Snow Lion for the text.

19 This containment of a thesis and reason in a single statement differentiates Buddhist syllogisms from
their 19th and 20th century Western logical counterparts, where a series of statements demonstrate the
inferential sequence.

20 “Persons” refer to the class of non-associated compositional factors, which are characteristics of “selves”
that are neither form (matter) nor consciousness (see Figure 1). The sense of self is in this class, and all
sentient beings who are conceived as having varying manifestations of such selves.

21 The Principal of Dolma Ling during my tenure there, Pema Tsewang Shastri, translated Tsa! as “Shame!”
to convey its feeling tone. No doubt the term comes from the Tibetan word “Tsa(r)” meaning “to finish.”

22 After three to five years of preliminary classes in debate, the first level or grade of the actual monastic
curriculum is “Parchen” (Prajnaparamita teachings) that last for about five years and focus on one text.

23 I don’t say this is the significance of the clapping. As Samdong Rinpoche (1981a) indicated, clapping
appears to have been part of the Indian habit of debating long before the tradition reached Tibetan soil.

24 For instance, a monk from Namgyal Monastery (1991), HH the Dalai Lama’s personal monastery, told
me that they were taught that some competition in debate and learning was helpful to motivate students.

25 I do know of one nun who did so. She is a very compassionate nun who struggles with academics of all
kinds. Like many of the Litang nuns, she came to Dolma Ling in her late teens and was not literate.
Unlike many of her companions, however, she did not make the transition into literacy easily, and struggles
with both English and the debate logic. Yet, she has a very strong motivation to work as a nurse or
healthcare worker, and her poor English was jeopardizing that. So, she was given permission to focus
instead on learning the material related to her healthcare interest rather than participate in debates. When I
arrived, she was absent for an entire month in a Chandigar hospital caring for a nun who had to have an
operation. I should add that there are nuns who would like to be exempted from the secular subjects
and English to focus on Buddhist philosophy and debate, and they are not permitted to do so as a rule either.

26 When I say “deviant” here I mean harmful, as in pedophilia and abuse. There is some sexual activity in
the monastic communities, driven underground as a taboo, but it appears to be contained to consenting,
benign expressions. It is tolerated or intentionally overlooked, especially in same-sex activities. As for
aggression, the monastic community, in spite of the large number of men living together from very
different backgrounds and training, enjoys very high levels of peace and low levels of crime.

27 Dr. James Garbarino’s (1999) recommends the application of a monastic rather than a boot camp model
doctrine to the treatment of violent youth. He points out the qualities of “contemplation, reflection,
service, cooperation, meditation, and peace, instead of confrontation, dominance, and power assertion” (p.
232). His monastic model includes the Tibetan branch monastery of Namgyal Monastery, which is located
in the town of Ithaca where Garbarino lives. This notion of certain forms of debate to channel aggressive
tendencies is not discussed, but offers an interesting support to his recommendation.

28 The connection between desire and intellectual curiosity is implicit in the word itself in English, which
shares a common Indo-European root with the word “to consider.” So, the IE root sweid becomes, on the
one hand sweat, and on the other to desire and to consider.

29 I queried leading lamas and researchers at the Tibetan Library of Works and Archives and at Amne
Machen, and none had yet found any textual corroboration to back the existence of this debating nunnery.

30 My sources for this story and the search for textual corroboration involved Ven. Losang Dechen and
Pema Tsewang Shastri of Dolma Ling, various lamas including Geshe Sonam Rinchen of the Tibetan
Library (LTWA) Buddhist program, Losang Shastri of the LTWA, and Tashi Tsering of Amne Machen.
GREEN: ...experience

Chapter four...
Remembering green...

Kangra wheatfield notes on skydancing and other feats of grace

"...remember this green; it's as perfect as it gets."

My confidence came from experience, having lived and loved so many fields in the world but none so lovely as the Kangra Valley of the Indian Himalayas. The green belonged to wheat, arranged in terraces ascending to the snowy Dauladar Mountains beyond. It is only for this brief and all too fragile moment in early March that the plants balance the luminous, radiant yellow of sun with the clear, oxygenated blue of sky to produce such a perfect green—a green that doesn’t lean too much to either side. Slender and vulnerable, these shafts of wheat wave and bend in the breeze without breaking or seeming disturbed.

When I told Angela to remember, I hoped she was listening. If we could just hold this green in our memories then it could return to comfort us, the colour of sunlight mixed with water reflecting a clear sky blue, a wheat-field green senses readily witness and memories willingly mark. I have become that wheat field and in some inexplicable way it has become me, not a wheat-field but a single shaft of wheat rising, full of hope and expectation, in spite of the endless harvests that have come and will come again. The world has feasted on my grains and I welcome its appetite, knowing that only in the eating will it return again and again...this breathtaking, luminous green.

Today is April 8th, three days after my 40th birthday. A storm just passed and the sun is returning to the valley where Myna birds take refuge on the backs of water buffaloes and flowers compete with fruit trees for kernels of light. These days the wheat
has grown long and segmented. Their bushy fading-green heads are weighted down with ripening grains that lean, like their yellowing colour, towards the sun. Still, they hold the promise of imminent harvests and so serve as a reminder of wellbeing.

There is a virtue to this day, not for any act of goodness but because it is indifferent to such concepts. It is simply alive, and in surviving is honest and real inside a corporeal body of time filled with eating, feeling, sensing. It is death that has sobered me, and with it a certain pleasure—that of survival. Death remedies excesses in abstract idealism and elation, so long as one survives to enjoy their absence. Death brings with it an unshakeable confidence that there is something remaining that is real, something that is capable of ending—livingness, if not experience itself. Living and dying may not be what we conceive them to be, but they are irrefutably real. Indeed, they are the real.

Green wheat and a decaying corpse. In this case, the corpse was left for six days until his brother-in-law was asked to identify it, a body no longer “his” but the shell he left behind like an afterbirth. Cremated, it was returned to his wife as ashes in an urn. Those are the bones of the story, the symbolics of language masking the real, which was the bare fact that he had been alive and now he was not. That is how I have reconstructed all that I have been told.

Life is a tenuous candle flame left outside in a storm; the miracle is not that we die but that we survive the elements and the tempests of our own confusions, intact. It is by this flame that I see my flesh and mind free of their shadows and auras. Today existence is simple and direct—calm accompanied by a dull ache. Death has wrested my attention from the preoccupations and obsessions of the last decade, bounced between a rather confusing attachment to a man and the desire to be a nun. The man has vanished
and my wish to be a nun seems an escapist extreme. All that remains is life—the real—this beautiful and precious thing constituted of the dust of history; sublime, it passes on the back of a wave of wind through successive embodiments. It is not an imagined or ideal life, but a clear, fine line of space between desire and fear, and one I inhabit well. I fit inside it like a second skin, a familiar and comfortable refuge that the robes of a nun and a wedding dress could never be.

I don’t know where to put all these experiences that inundate me, the experiences of dying and living, the sublime beauties and horrors, now so vivid and clear. It is my research, yet as I search deeper there is more ineffable reality than story, more subjective nuance than objective fact, as the turgidity of academic prose begins to slip away. In its place I hear the approaching footsteps of those I have yet to name. I see the remnants of those I have named, the muddy bits and dangerous moments involved in searching again for a life worth living, through the eyes and fields of a foreign land where things aren’t as foreign as I once imagined. These are the wheatfieldnotes, the vestiges of experience beyond the monastic grounds. Living in a Tibetan Buddhist nunnery in the Kangra Valley is not a research topic one happens upon easily. It found me, and in finding me has taken me far away from the relationship between critical reasoning and experience in Buddhist education. It has revealed landscapes where intellects holds little value, where words become echoes bereft of solace and experience makes a mockery of ideas.

As I came East, he went West. The timing was so exact we would have crossed the ocean at the same time had I not delayed my departure two weeks to do a meditation retreat. Perhaps that’s why I survived. He arrived in his university in the American Southwest as I arrived in the wheatfields of the Kangra Valley to re-search something “I”
and some collective "we" had misplaced or failed to find. What I found instead was happiness, the wisdom of happiness, and I arrived at it like the summit of a mountain on the very day he returned to hang himself in anonymity in Par Gang, a Western tourist sector of New Delhi. How can it be that our fates, seemingly so connected, could end up so tragically apart? As I prepare to visit his wife, shafts of wheat come to mind, not lotus blossoms, but shafts of wheat rising out of mud. Wheat, simple and honest, stripped of the rare, exotic, and functionless beauty of the lotus, wheat that corporeal bodies feast on.

There is a legend that Chenreisig (Avalokiteshvara), the deity of compassion, dwelling high above in a jewelled mountain palace, became so overwhelmed by the suffering he witnessed on Earth that he cried a tear that fell to the ground in the valley below to form a lake. Out of that lake appeared a lotus from which Tara, the female Buddha of Enlightened Activity, was born. In Tibetan, Tara is called Dolma, and this nunnery where I now live is called Dolma Ling, Tara’s place, set among wheat-fields that ascend to snow-white mountain peaks and the residence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, considered to be an emanation of Chenreisig. He calls Tara the first feminist in history. Pre-dating Sakyamuni Buddha, she is said to have refuted the wish to be reborn as a man and vowed instead to return again and again as a woman until the end of time—thereby affirming that women evolve into Buddhas. She is dearly beloved by Tibetans, who believe she helps those in abject conditions to make their wishes come true.

These are samplings from notes I composed along the edges of the Kangra wheatfields, where I walked every day as the sun set behind the Dalaudar mountains His Holiness the Dalai Lama now calls home. This has become my home too, but here below, at the feet of those mountains, in the Kangra Valley where we know little of
lotuses and palaces of jewels, just wheat-fields and the occasional patches of tea, fruit blossoms, and wildflowers. There is, of course, Norbulingka, “the jewelled garden” next door, but the only jewels it offers these days are for sale, as it functions primarily to employ refugee artists and artisans from Tibet in need of livelihood.

It is suffering we deny, even more than death, and it is suffering we censor, even more than desire. Especially when autobiographically depicted. To write honestly of suffering invites controversy and alienation. Yet, suffering inscribes itself most vividly on our consciousness, dominating our attention even when we hold it like a screaming voice muffled under a feather pillow, the private secret we hide from the sanitizing gaze of the public realm that is organized to deny it. Yet suffering can be sweet when looked at directly, transforming into something else—humility, compassion, honesty. Suffering is not the common topic of classroom curricula, except under a detached and theoretical guise; it lives like an illicit secret we mask with rational pretensions, driving us to study and accomplish what we do. It is spoken of in universals out of fear it will appear as something obscene if spoken of in the honesty of an “I/eye.” So, a certain duplicity pervades our lives. If we really tell all, what then?

...It was the sheer absence of suffering that made our month together so remarkable. It wasn’t that there weren’t moments of anguish or anger, but that they passed without scars, leaving a deep contentment. When Lhosar (Tibetan New Year) arrived on the 27th of February, George and Angela had been in India only two days. That morning, I dreamt I was flying. When I landed on earth, it was in a bed of new wheat shoots where people had gathered for a picnic. Part of the Tibetan New Year (Lhosar) celebrations include planting seeds in a tin can or small container, and if the
plants sprout, then it is considered a lucky sign for the coming year. So, my dream gave me optimism as we began the gruelling climb of Jogibara road to the temple, weaving our way among a parade of taxicabs for which we were but shadows in the night. We were early, and, finding only a few Tibetans sitting in the lower level designated for plebeians, staked a claim in the front row. With inflatable insulites and cushions along with layered clothing, we felt protected from the harsh Himalayan elements.

Within an hour the rains stopped and the first sunbeam made its way into the temple courtyard where we sat at the helm of thousands of Tibetans and Westerners. A three-year-old Tibetan girl had captivated our attentions, chanting an unending chorus of hellos to the white-faced passer-bys. With a disarmingly bright affection, she jokingly blessed the bald heads of monks with one of Angela's trolls, as though the toy was a ritual device and she a lama. We all seemed to appreciate her toddler wit and laughed, except the monks who looked rather perplexed. We hardly noticed time pass until, at 8:30 a.m., His Holiness appeared directly above us at a microphone, bathed in a golden-yellow light supplied by the Lhosar morning sun.

He spoke in less formal Tibetan than usual, much of which even I could understand. He pointed out how auspicious it was for the sun to appear so radiant on the first morning of the Tibetan lunar year, and how important it was that our minds were positively inclined in these initial hours of the new year. He wished us and our families good luck, and with great warmth and affection, blessed us with folded hands and smiling eyes. As he walked by to return to his residence, he appeared to have a near-liquid light, clear in colour, coalescing in a six-inch space around his mouth and nose. I have always
found it most remarkable that this man’s very body bears witness to his greatness—his “enlightenment”—not just his words or deeds.

So that was one beginning. Each day offered a unique experience, each inclusive of but greater than the day before. Early in the visit we spent time at Dolma Ling, meditating on Tara and walking through the wheatfields. That’s when I remarked to Angela to remember the wheat shoots and their perfect hue of green. After an exhilarating Free Tibet concert on March 10th, the anniversary of the Lhasa uprising, we began daily instructions and teachings with His Holiness the Dalai Lama concerning Tsongkhapa’s commentary on Atisha’s Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment. We sat in the temple courtyard on a shaded landing 100 feet from the Dalai Lama’s outdoor throne, alongside the English translator, Venerable Lakdor, as well as Richard Gere and other Western Buddhists and young tourists. Every day, His Holiness passed in front of us enroute to and from his private residence, glancing over to smile with a quality of deep love and personal attention...

...There is a mouse in my room here in the nunnery guesthouse. Every night it shreds newspaper and black plastic bags into minute pieces in the cupboard above my closet. In the morning, there is a trail of black plastic running down the curtain to the ground below. Whatever the mouse is doing with those newspapers and plastic bags is serious business, which leads me to suspect that the business may involve baby mice. In the evening, when I meditate by candlelight before going to sleep, I see the curtain wave as the mouse descends. I know it’s a mouse because on the day I returned I saw it run across the kitchen floor. Now it’s more circumspect and betrays itself only through its works—the sound of the shredding of plastic or the gnawing of wood, the sight of a
waving curtain or teeth marks on a new tomato or candy cane. Sometimes, as I am resting in the afternoon, I actually see a grey streak in my visual field as I am dosing off. It seems to know when I am sleeping, and those are the times it ventures out of hiding. The only problem is that it mistakes meditation for sleep, such that the very time I am most alert, my consciousness becomes preoccupied with “mouse”—sounds of curtains rustling, claws moving down fabric then up again, uncertain. I sometimes wonder if my mouse doesn’t read brainwaves rather than sounds, and sensing alpha waves, descends.

As I write these words, I am sitting on the small couch next to the screened patio in my room. The afternoon sun streams in behind me, warming both my hands and the laptop keyboard as I write. The view looks out over an oasis of rocks and trees that line the stream beside the nunnery. The wheatfields are beyond the rocks and just out of view. I know they are there by the hollow space between the rocks and the horizon of mountains rising up behind. I am calmed by the sounds of the stream and the birds gathered along its banks. In the autumn, I saw numerous turquoise and rust birds that I assume were kingfishers, and more recently, I beheld a pure white dove-like creature with crested head feathers and a two-foot long bifurcated tail to match, which it wore like a silk-white evening gown. The bird was quite small, and the long tail feathers made flying awkward, leading me to conclude that beauty has its own evolutionary value. I saw a similar bird near the wheat-fields the following day, larger and blue, but with the same, remarkable plumage. On special occasions, the ravens congregate by the stream, as many as fifty at a time. Their descent is usually accompanied by a powerful and uncanny wind. Of course, even more ubiquitous are the chickadees and sparrows, their sweet voices pervading the early afternoon air.
Closer to earth, three large dogs and several smaller ones are ever vigilant in their varied views concerning the territorial defence of Dolma Ling. The large dogs are preoccupied with canine culture and have little inclination to bother with the humans moving about the place. They spend their days protecting the grounds from other dogs, or unearthing gargantuan water buffalo bones from secret stashes. One such thighbone rests in the grass outside my door, a souvenir of the starker realities of sentient existence, which are easily overlooked in the face of all this natural beauty. The small dogs, on the other hand, are obsessed with human beings. The secretary’s dog, Yiga, for instance, though small, is quite ruthless in discerning in-siders from out-, and offers those of the “outsider” class little peace in her presence. It takes about a month for one to move from “out-“ to “in-“ status according to Yiga, a shift signalled by her high-pitched barking becoming an equally relentless slurpy, wet kiss. All these dogs share the grounds with seven cows residing in a cowshed adjacent to the nunnery. The cows come to my backyard to graze and enjoy my leftover vegetables and fruit peels, though these days they seem to prefer the plethora of wild flowers and grasses.

The most stunning animal to appear at Dolma Ling came when the nuns and most staff had vacated for the mountain to attend the Monlam Prayer Festival. Late one evening, Angela and I ventured out of my room to use the office telephone of the nunnery. As we approached the kitchen, I saw a three-foot creature with a striped tail of equal length bolt up the stairs. At first I thought it was a large racoon (there are no racoons in India to my knowledge) or a domestic cat (much too large). It finally occurred to me that what I had seen was a small leopard. Earlier in the month, I saw four Indian men carrying a dead leopard on a stick through the streets, and at Dolma Ling, a leopard
left paw-marks in a now-dried cement walkway. People say the leopards come down from the snowy mountains in the winter to prey on chickens and small dogs. That night, as we continued up the stairs to the office, I saw the wild and graceful creature again, sitting at the end of a corridor leading to the empty nuns’ quarters. We held one another’s gaze for barely an instant before it again disappeared into the darkness. I wanted to follow, but Angela cautioned me against it.

As the memory of the leopard fades, the sweet aftertaste of a Bach Cello Suite lingers in the air from my laptop’s CD-ROM. As it passes, my attention drifts to the sound of wings flapping as a bird readjusts its position on my patio, and on to stream sounds, a cuckoo bird, and the whistles and songs of chickadees. A gentle breeze fans tree branches where silk-white butterflies flitter about, blending in with the white flower tops of wild grasses that now coat the lawn outside my door. As I watch, the wind closes the patio doors and my view disappears, as if wishing me inside. I hear a groan of thunder in the distance, the first hint that another storm may be on its way. It’s 3:00 in the afternoon and I only just finished lunch—a three-tiered bowl of basmati rice, chickpeas and potato, all topped with cashew nuts, cabbage and peas cooked in a tomato and onion base. The aftertaste is as pleasurable as eating it was in the first place, though fatigue comes with the blending of flavours, and I rest.

Later, I follow the farming woman to the farthest edges of the wheat-fields where the tea gardens and the trees take over. She stops to fill her basket with greens for livestock, watching me suspiciously through one corner of her eye. I turn and return from where I came, along the narrow elevated path that runs between the bright green wheat-fields, over the rocks that cross the short ditch down to the water where I cross
barefoot, half in river and half on rocks. On the other side, two grey mules graze in the grass, each of their left legs tied to the other’s to prevent them from drifting. I drift and find the sounds of the Dari fair have vanished while on a large rock by the road sit two monks, teachers from the nunnery. We chat before I return home.

...The 25th of March 1998 was a good luck day for some people in Dharamsala, where Angela, George, and I were invited to make offerings to HH the Dalai Lama following a White Tara long life puja sponsored by Khalkha Jetsun Dhampa Rinpoche. We dressed in silks shirts and dresses, bearing six-foot long white khatas (silk ceremonial offering scarves) for the occasion. We waited with various Tibetan monks, nuns, and lay people who carried long-life statues, tankha paintings, Buddhist texts, and carpets. Squeezing in at the end of the line, we tried decorously to keep the ends of our long khatas off the ground. The Bhuriat monk in charge came and told us to come with him to the front of the line where Rinpoche’s brother, Uncle, stood waiting with an envelope and khata. “You’ll go up with him at the end to offer your khatas.” This pleased me as I knew it meant we would actually reach the throne for a blessing.

We waited on the stairs as the procession of offerings paraded by in front of His Holiness. Afterwards, a Namgyal monk appeared and waved Uncle to go up to the top of the stairs leading to the throne, and we were soon invited to follow. There were thousands of people present that day: at least 1,000 monks and nuns on the top floor of the temple watching on monitors, and another few thousand or so Tibetans and Westerners in the courtyard behind where we stood. High lamas, geshes, a recognized dakini and the king of Bhutan and his family sat in the covered, inner rectangular area of the temple surrounding the throne. Namgyal monks stood near His Holiness to arrange
various ritual objects. I stood behind Uncle, followed by Angela and George. Tibetan security guards in navy suit jackets stood near pillars and alongside the stairs.

As I arrived at the entrance, I eyed His Holiness through a gap in the banisters. He saw me immediately and smiled, seeming a little surprised. A monk passed him a ritual object to bless, and he looked down briefly before his eyes returned to mine, smiling. He was happy, and his happiness became a silent stream passing between us. I have met him on several occasions: at a Kalachakra in L.A. in 1989, during a private audience in 1992, and then earlier this year during the weeklong Mind and Life Conference with Western scientists and observers at his residence. I joined various public audiences with him over the years as well, both in Canada and abroad. Uncle began to move forward, and as he did a wave of maroon robes parted like the waters of a sea we passed through effortlessly. I felt my identity as a woman acutely, but felt reassured by the welcoming smiles of His Holiness and Khalkha Rinpoche, who was seated nearby. At the throne, I stood up to meet His Holiness’ right hand, cupped open near my cheek. Someone said we were from Canada and he smiled. I bowed my head and said, “Thank-you,” as I took the red blessing cord dangling from his left hand.

On the same morning of March 25th, 1998, a plane descended through a haze of smog-yellow and dusty-blue that was the sky above New Delhi, bearing my friend’s husband. He went from the airport to a hotel where he hanged himself, only to be found three days later by hotel staff who became suspicious. He was a noted scholar and translator who had helped me find a translator and support for my program of research in Dharamsala, where he had many friends. I had connected him, in turn, with a friend of mine in Arizona who had helped him get settled there. Yet, as I had come to find such
welcome and happiness with his people, his time in America proved traumatic, and indeed so much so as to incite this tragic decision that is devastating his family. Suicide is rare in the Tibetan exile community, so neither the family nor their community seem able to respond to what has happened. In the note he left behind, he said it was because of his studies, because he was unable to keep up in his Library Sciences classes with the heavy emphasis on technology. It may have been the English as well, or the alienation, and it was most certainly depression, which was his response to the stress. He had lost weight and had difficulty sleeping. His death added fuel to my question—why this radical difference in our experiences? I found such quality, depth and richness of life in the Himalayas, poor and undeveloped as the region may be, where he found only alienation and death in America—the coveted modern land of the rich and the free.

...The month of May has arrived with its rather haunting landscapes. I have avoided the wheatfields lately, but today I force myself to go. I find the terraces replete with dry-yellow turning brown as the wheat prepares itself for its descent to earth. The stalks are turgid and remain undisturbed by the wind, while their tips turn brown and hang limply. Still, they offered a strange beauty, especially set against the deep botanical green of wild grasses that line the borders of the fields. My mouse is now among these grasses making a new home. Actually, s/he turned out to be they—four to be exact—all of whom I carried in intervals across the stream to be released.

When I went for my walk through the wheatfields today, I crossed the rocks of the river, my movements measured and controlled, yet free and with a certain casual confidence. I thought of the Indian women gliding over the rocks carrying three foot diameter baskets full of fodder on their heads. Today, as I landed comfortably on the
other side, one of these women stood watching and waiting. She smiled, and the basket on her head seemed the only difference between us. I smiled back, conspiratorially. It is usually women who work in the fields, harvesting the grains for their livestock with curved sickles and knives. They wear brilliant colours, looking breathtakingly beautiful set against the ocean of golden wheat sheaves. Today, I saw one woman in a lime green skirt, a hot-pink top, and a brilliant yellow scarf, appearing like colour incarnate.

I keep trying to bring these notes to some sense of closure, but am beginning to realize that my efforts are futile. The rhythm of life here supports continuity, not openings and closures. All I can hope is to dip in and out of its vortex of activity and procreation and fecundity, which goes on and on and on. Nevertheless, there are two things of particular note. First I would like to point out that almost all the people who work in the fields now know me, smile, or say hello as I pass—women, men, and children. The women in particular seem pleased to see me, and smile generously. I think they recognize the beauty of their habitat and know that we share that appreciation. The culture makes it impossible for me to feel as warm and open with the men, even though they have become very welcoming in the last week. As harvest draws near, more people have come to the fields to collect grains for their families and animals, or to bring their animals to graze.

Second, I want to say that these Indian women I meet every day are oppressed, that they are burdened by a yoke of unending labour and sexism that denies them the type of intellectual pleasure enjoyed by myself and the Tibetan refugee nuns in the debate courtyards. I want to say this because it makes better sense of my own world, but I can’t. I don’t know the least about their domestic lives or views. What I do know is that many
of them appear to be happy, that they seem to know what it is to love if not be loved, and that many appear to derive great pleasure and satisfaction from their lives and from whatever sources of happiness sustain them. That to me is quite remarkable.

...As I prepare to return to Canada these weeks later, I make my final journey to the wheatfields. The earlier crop has been harvested and I find the terraced fields now flooded and appearing like a series of small ponds and lakes ascending into the sky. The river, on the other hand, has dried up from the scorching sun and irrigation draining. I walk across the river easily now, for it has become a rush of pebbles rather than water. The path through the fields, on the other hand, is muddy and dips into a succession of pools of water. Yet, the path is functional; the villagers work to make it so. Today is Sunday and there are mostly men in the field with large hoes turning the earth. Many work in little clothing except a simple white loincloth as they dig under the intense June sun. They smile warmly as I walk by. Several pass me on the path and ask me in Hindi what I am doing in the fields. I wave at the scenery and make a gesture of walking, and they say, "A-cha"—"Oh, I see". I make my way along the path up the hill, past the old ruins of a house, over the stream and irrigation canals, to the top of an incline where a small village sits in the shade. The sun sinks below some clouds, radiating haloes and lines of light in the sky like some angel in the distance. I look behind me at the descending pools of still water, glittering in the reflection of its light. I look towards the small village where the stone path leads up around some gnarled trees towards a yellow mud house, and promise to remember, engraving the scene on my consciousness.

On the way home to Dolma Ling, I cross the river of pebbles and see a group of gray and white vultures in a tree lift and fly into a nearby ravine. I have never seen
vultures so close to the ground; they seem huge and grotesque like animate gargoyles. As I move closer, more appear overhead flying towards the ravine, while still others emerge from adjacent trees. Moving in unison, they create a rush of air with their monumental wings. There are hundreds, and I walk guardedly up to the ravine to see what it is that is attracting them. Once there, I see the vultures tearing at the guts and skin of a water buffalo carcass. Its hide, discoloured in pink and grey patches, is splayed across the ground where its intestines spill green slime as its deathbed.

The vultures struggle with the buffalo’s flesh, jabbing their beaks forcibly into the carcass and coming out with a frenetic tug. The buffalo is hollowed out in minutes; the vultures, intoxicated, crawl inside the ribcage in search of more. Some become desperate and start to attack other vultures barring their way. Others stand aside, while still others sit in the tree above, watching. I shudder for a moment, wondering if they ever mistake living flesh for that of carrion. I startle and duck my head as one takes off above me. To calm myself, I say White Tara mantras for long life, and as I do, the birds lift into the air simultaneously. I find the synchronicity astounding, until I notice a large white dog standing on a nearby rock; s/he chases a vulture lingering on the ground. As I turn to leave, the birds descend again. A death to mark an ending. I walk away quickly, aware I am late for my own dinner at the nunnery.
(above) A bird as seen through a window in Bodh Gaya; (below) scenes from Kangra Valley fields
SONGS OF EXPERIENCE

...What is the price of Experience: do men buy it for a song
Or wisdom for a dance in the street? No it is bought with the price
Of all that a man hath, his house his wife his children.
Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy
And in the wither'd field where the farmer plows for bread in vain.

It is an easy thing to triumph in the summer's sun
And in the vintage, & to sing on the waggon loaded with corn.
It is an easy thing to talk of patience to the afflicted
To speak the laws of prudence to the houseless wanderer,
To listen to the hungry ravens cry in wintry season
When the red blood is fill's with wine & with the marrow of lambs.

William Blake, excerpt from Vala, or The Four Zoas

Reason is only reason, and it only satisfies man's rational requirements.
Desire, on the other hand, is the manifestation of life itself.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Notes from the Underground

...I arrive in every second
in order to laugh and cry,
in order to fear and hope.

My joy is like spring, so warm
it makes flowers bloom
in my hands.

The rhythm of my heart
is the birth and death of
all that are alive.

My pain is like a river of tears—
so full it fills up all the
four oceans.

Thich Nhat Hanh

December 22, 1997 (as posted on the Tibetan Information Network)

GENEVA, December 22, 97 (Reuters) -- The respected International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) said on Monday Chinese-ruled Tibet was "under alien subjugation" and called for a United Nations-run referendum to decide its future status.

The Geneva-based body, which works to defend the rule of law around the globe, declared in a major report that the autonomy Beijing argues is enjoyed by Tibetans was fictitious and that real power lay in Chinese hands.
"It is to maintain its alien and unpopular rule that China has sought to suppress Tibetan nationalist dissent and extinguish Tibetan culture," said ICJ Secretary-General Adama Dieng, a lawyer from Senegal in an introduction to the report. "It is to colonize unwilling subjects that China has encouraged and facilitated the mass movement of ethnic Chinese populations into Tibet, where they dominate the region's politics and security, as well as its economy."

I. Executive Summary

This report examines the situation of the rule of law and human rights in Tibet, including self-determination and other collective rights; economic, social and cultural rights; and civil and political rights. Although the report discusses the entire period since China's invasion of Central Tibet in 1950, its focus is on events of recent years.

Language

The predominance of the Chinese language in education, commerce, and administration, combined with global modernization, compels Tibetans to master Chinese and is marginalising the Tibetan language. Virtually all classes in secondary and higher education in the TAR [that is, Tibetan Autonomous Region], including such subjects as Tibetan art, are taught in Chinese. Recent measures - apparently following a Communist Party decision linking use of Tibetan language to pro-independence sentiments - include the shutting of experimental middle school classes in Tibetan in the TAR and a further downgrading of the use of Tibetan in education generally.

Development

The pattern of development of Tibet, while materially beneficial in its transfer to Tibet of modern technologies of health care, transport and communications, has marginalized Tibetans, and excluded them from effective participation, which is an intrinsic aspect of development. The livelihood of most Tibetans, who live in small rural communities, has been neglected, receiving little of the Chinese investment. The relative poverty of Tibetans, the exploitation of Tibetan resources for China's development, and the settlement of considerable numbers of Chinese in new urban centres impact negatively on Tibetan communities.

Environment

In forty years, most Tibetan wildlife has been destroyed and much of the forest has been cut, watersheds and hill slopes eroded and downstream flooding heightened. The most extensive environmental impact of Chinese practice is the widespread degradation of the rangelands, resulting in desertification of large areas capable until recently of sustaining both wild and domestic herds. The extent of grassland deterioration has reached a point where, unless measures are taken soon, the long-term viability of nomadic Tibetan civilization could be brought into question.

Individual Rights

The Role of the Judiciary

A primary stated goal of the justice system in the TAR is the repression of Tibetan opposition to Chinese rule. A judiciary subservient to Communist Party dictates results in abuses of human rights in all of China, but in Tibet the problem is particularly severe due to China's campaign against Tibetan nationalism. The recent "Strike Hard" anti-crime campaign has enlisted the judiciary further in the campaign against "splittism." Many Tibetans, particularly political detainees, are deprived of even elementary safeguards of due process.

Right to Education

The Chinese government has made great strides in providing compulsory primary education to Tibetan children. The education system in Tibet, however, puts Tibetan children at a structural disadvantage compared to Chinese children. The exclusive use of the Chinese language as the medium of instruction in middle and secondary schools in the TAR, the low enrolment and high drop-out rate among Tibetans, the low quality of education facilities and teachers for Tibetans, the difficulties in educational access for Tibetans, as well as a TAR illiteracy rate triple the national average, are indicative of a discriminatory structure. Rather than instilling in Tibetan children respect for their own cultural identity, language and values, education in Tibet serves to convey a sense of inferiority in comparison to the dominant Chinese culture and values.
I. The nuns’ experiences:

**Song 13**
Looking from the window  
Seeing nothing but the sky  
The clouds that float in the sky  
I wish were my parents.

We, the captured friends in spirit,  
We might be the one’s to fetch the jewel.  
No matter how hard we are beaten  
Our linked arms cannot be separated.

The cloud from the east [China]  
Is not a patch that is sewn;  
The time will come when the sun [Tibet]  
From beneath the clouds shall appear.

I am not sad.  
If asked why,  
Days will follow days  
And the time to release

**Song 15**
My country has not been sold but stolen  
We have sent letters of truth  
We have sent letters  
Parents of this lifetime  
Please do not be sad  
The time of our reunion will come.

My country has not been sold but stolen  
We have shed so many tears  
Oh so many tears!  
Parents, so dear  
Your kindness comforts us  
The time will come for our reunion  
I send words of comfort to my parents.  
Do not be sad.  
The time will come for our reunion.

Songs recorded by nuns imprisoned in Drapchi prison  
and later smuggled out [see Ngawang Sangdrol’s biography]

In 1992 I taught the nuns of Dolma Ling English while they were housed in temporary rental homes in the Kangra Valley, near the current site of the nunnery. They lived in cramped conditions without proper toilets or amenities. Added to this, most suffered physically from ailments ranging from infected mosquito bites through to tuberculosis and typhoid fever, while suffering ubiquitously from homesickness and culture shock. I was the only staff person on site for much of the time, though their monk debate teacher stayed in one of the rooms during working weekdays, and a nurse came down for several days a week. So, in addition to teaching English language classes, I tried to keep track of their medical needs, to administer first aid, and to refer them to doctors and hospitals when needed. Furthermore, every Saturday I interviewed select nuns for a pocket calendar we were publishing as a fundraiser for the nunnery.
At the suggestion of the administration, I first interviewed the nuns who had been incarcerated and tortured in Tibet. I did so on the supposition that having someone listen to their stories might offer some therapeutic benefit. What I found was that following each interview, the nuns displayed signs of extreme restlessness and agitation; some became depressed and disturbed, while two came down with severe though undiagnosed abdominal pains that required hospitalization, all common indicators of post-traumatic stress disorder. Frankly, it was very hard on me as well; I found that I became very empathetically connected to these nuns and experienced a small measure of their trauma. Afterwards, I interviewed nuns from less traumatized backgrounds and other regions. I include samples of these interviews here, under fictitious names, using their words as translated by Dolma Tulotsang of Toronto, Canada, with my assistance:

A. **Osel Khargyen:** I met Osel Khargyen during one preliminary visit to the nunnery in 1992 to administer English language assessments. She was one of the youngest nuns—18 years or age. In spite of her small stature, she had a remarkably strong presence. Her written Tibetan was of a very high quality, which was unusual given most of the nuns were not even literate. Her eyes emanated a disarming wisdom and intelligence born of suffering, radiating knowledge and experience beyond her years. I saw all this long before I heard her story...

As a child, our parents warned us not to sing Tibetan songs or use slogans for a Free Tibet, to protect us from retaliation by the Chinese. Yet, at the same time, they often spoke to us in great detail about the Tibet of their youth--Tibet under His Holiness the Dalai Lama. ...They often referred to our uncles, two monks
who were killed in succession in the Lhasa uprising of 1959 and during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s. They urged us to remember our own culture in the face of the sinocization of our language and laws and the ubiquitous Chinese flag and troops. They told us to remember that the red flag was not our own, that we had a flag with two snow lions and a sun. It became so that we could envision the Tibetan flag in all its details without ever having seen it, for we had created and preserved it in a place the Chinese could never reach—our own minds.

I became a nun in 1988, at the age of 14. Until that time, I had gone to school for several years and later assisted my mother and sisters with their labours in the fields. When he was 14 years old, my brother was taken to China to be educated as a policeman. He returned four years later and I went to visit him in the prison where he worked. He supported my decision to become a nun, encouraging me above all else to become educated for the benefit of Tibet. We shared that motivation, in spite of our seemingly different lives.

After becoming a nun, on one of my holidays home, an uncle from Rathu monastery arrived who had been imprisoned for five months following a demonstration in 1987. He spoke to me at length about the ethics of civil disobedience and encouraged me to protest or at least to refrain from criticizing those who did so. He said the decision to demonstrate was a highly moral though difficult choice, given one risked imprisonment, torture, and possibly death. He said it was an act Tibetans must at least support if not engage in themselves. Our discussions helped solidify my conviction to work for the freedom of our people; I felt it to be my duty both as a nun and as a Tibetan.
During the ensuing year, Osel Khargyen posted independence flyers and demonstrated on several occasions. In her first protest, she joined 15 other monks and nuns during Monlam (New Year’s prayer festival) in the Barkhor [central square] in 1989, after which a man from Kham hid her inside a building to protect her from the police. Later that year, in September, she joined 22 other Chubsang nuns to demonstrate at the Norbulinga, where large crowds had gathered to attend an opera. The nuns paraded in a circle around the crowd, calling out “Free Tibet!” and “Long Live the Dalai Lama!”.

When the Chinese police/troops arrived with electric cattle prods, people in the crowd hid her between their legs while she changed out of her identifiable monastic robes into lay clothing. Nine nuns were arrested that day, including her close friend and Dolma Ling companion, Metok Yangsom [see next profile].

...On the 14th day of the eighth Tibetan lunar month [roughly one month later, i.e. October] of 1989, I went to visit Metok Yangsom and another nun, a cousin of mine who’d been arrested; they were both held at Gutsa prison. I wasn’t permitted to visit them, but while I was waiting, six nuns were brought in for celebrating the announcement that His Holiness was to receive the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize. The nuns had been arrested in the Barkhor, and another cousin of mine was among them. It was then that I resolved to demonstrate the following morning.

Two other nuns from Chubsang joined me. We procured a permit to enter the Barkhor, and once there, found riot police everywhere, swinging their riot sticks about in an intimidating manner. We lined up behind the marching troops and began to shout slogans calling for a free Tibet. We were apprehended almost
immediately and taken to a nearby police station. Our hands were tied behind our backs and we were kicked and beaten repeatedly. From there, we were transferred to the main police station and interrogated. We were asked why we had demonstrated and who had incited us to do so. We answered that no one had taught us, and that, quite to the contrary, it was the Chinese themselves who were to blame for denying the Tibetans our fundamental rights and freedoms. We said that so long as they continued to evict us from our nunneries and interfere with our religious education, we had no choice but to protest.

When we arrived at Gutsa prison we were stripped, beaten, and interrogated individually. We were then placed outside in the cold facing the sun for the entire day. In the courtyard, we were joined by several Tibetan laywomen who had been arrested for singing independence songs; one was elderly and another was nine months pregnant. They weren’t permitted to sit down until finally, late in the afternoon, the pregnant woman began to go into labour; only then did the guards release her. As for us, we were placed in solitary confinement without food. Eventually, they gave us rice soup containing a yellowish substance we call “phituk,” which made our stomachs ache and swell.

In the Barkhor, the soldiers and police had repeatedly beaten me in the head before dragging me along the ground to the awaiting van, where they threw me, hitting my head against the roof. Thereafter, I suffered frequent headaches and still do to this day. I was left in solitary confinement for 18 days before being placed in a cell with my friend and fellow Chubsang nun, Metok Belkey. Some provisions were made for prisoners over 17 years of age to receive family visitors;
however, as I was only 15 years of age, I was denied such privileges. I became severely weakened by malnutrition and experienced chronic dizziness, shaking, and headaches. Eventually, I was taken to the prison hospital; the medical staff there said I was suffering from malnutrition and I should be given more food. In spite of their recommendation, my diet was not altered. After six months of incarceration and near starvation, I finally complained to the guards, saying we were not being given sufficient food. I was made to stand for the entire day for doing so. Then we heard that prostrations might help our health; I was too weak, but my cellmate tried. She was caught, beaten with chains, and warned that if she continued doing prostrations she would be placed in the male block of the prison.

After spending ten months in Gutsa prison, I was released. I was not able to return to my nunnery by decree of the Chinese officials. So, instead, I spent the first two months of my purported freedom living with my family. Then I went to Lhasa where I stayed with a monk cousin of mine who was studying Tibetan medicine. I had arranged through an underground network at Gutsa prison to escape from Tibet when I was released. There is little opportunity for a nun or monk to survive as such in Tibet after imprisonment. Reluctantly, I left Tibet on the 22nd day of the ninth Tibetan month [app. November] of 1990. Forty other people joined me. We departed in a van from Lhasa at 11:00 p.m. and drove to Poorchen, a town near the border of Nepal. From Poorchen, we walked into Nepal through the mountains over 18 days and through four nights. By the time we reached Nepal our numbers had swelled to 80. We proceeded to Kathmandu
and from there to Sarnath, India, where HH the Dalai Lama was giving the Kalachakra Initiation for World Peace.

After the Kalachakra initiation, I came to Dharamsala and eventually settled here at Dolma Ling where most of the Chubsang nuns reside in exile. I teach introductory written Tibetan to beginning level classes and assist with the financial management of the nunnery. I can’t comment on whether or not life in India is good or bad because it isn’t our country. My thoughts are always with Tibet; I cannot ever feel at peace or settled so long as I am living in exile and Tibet is not free.

These days, seven years later, Osel Khargyen is one of two Dolma Ling nuns studying at a school of dialectics and teacher training program near the city of Kangra. Shortly after arriving in India, she learned through a rumour in Dharamsala that someone had sent money with a pilgrim for death prayers for a woman from her village. That woman, she discovered, was her mother. Her father had died when she was eight years old, and Osel Khargyen believed her mother now died “of a broken heart.”

B. Metok Yangsom: Shortly after Metok Yangsom came to India, her mother died from “the sadness of a broken heart” as well, a sadness stemming from the suffering, imprisonment, and eventual exile of her daughter. Like most of the nuns who demonstrate, Metok’s politicization is rooted in her experience of being a nun in Tibet:

...My parents were farmers. As a child I used to play a lot—with bean bags, skipping ropes, and balls. Then, when I was 11 years old, I went to school for one year to study the Tibetan language. I was happy as a child; my parents
were both alive then and I was still ignorant of the politics that plague my people. Now I am deeply saddened by memories of Tibet, given my awareness of the degradation and suffering we continue to endure at the hands of the occupying Chinese. Here in India life seems so easy; yet, the ease makes us forget about Tibet and all our brothers and sisters who remain there in adversity.

...When I was 18 years old, I became a nun. I had cousins in Lhasa who were nuns, and there were others in our town. So, I was quite familiar with the lifestyle. Even as a child I had a lot of religious faith and a sincere wish to practice the dharma, so becoming a nun was a natural choice for me to make. In 1989, I joined Chubsang Ani Gompa (*ani gompa* is the term for a nunnery in Tibetan, and literally means “nuns’ monastery”). It used to be a retreat place for the monks of Sera monastery. It lies immediately behind the monastery on the side of a mountain just outside of Lhasa. In the late 1980’s there were 200 nuns there; since then, 160 have been expelled and over 30 others arrested or forced into exile. We had a very low standard of living at the nunnery and little opportunity to study. We spent our days making offerings and memorizing texts.

In September 1989, during the tea break of our morning offertories, 22 nuns including myself left for the Norbulinga, the former summer palace of HH the Dalai Lama. We had heard word from some monks that a demonstration was scheduled there during a special opera performance. Many Tibetans attended the opera that morning, and so we began our protest by circumambulating the crowd and shouting ‘Free Tibet!’ A nun from Shungsep Nunnery and four monks joined us. The Chinese police soon arrived with electric cattle prods. Only nine of the
27 demonstrators were arrested, all nuns, including myself—eight from Chubsang and the one nun from Shungsep.

The police arrested us forcibly, with three police for each one of us. One held my neck while the other two took each arm. They put us in a truck headed for Gutsa Prison. Once there, we were lined up and interrogated. Our interrogators slapped our faces and ears, sometimes hard enough to cause us to lose our hearing. Then, they queried us separately, asking us the same questions: ‘Why did you shout? Who taught you to do this? How do you think you’ll succeed in gaining independence for Tibet?’ I answered truthfully, saying that I did not need to be taught, that I had come of my own free will as a natural response to the great suffering I had personally witnessed in Tibet.

When I first entered the interrogation chamber, I was stripped naked and searched. I was then beaten with chairs, sticks, and electric cattle prods. These prods were placed in my mouth and twisted around. There were two sizes, one for children and the other for adults. When placed inside the mouth, they draw blood and rapidly deteriorate the body. The guards hit me on the head with the prods as well, and kicked me in the stomach. I have heard it said that lay people, especially women, pass out almost immediately during such interrogations; however, we monks and nuns are able to remain conscious for much longer, probably as a result of our vows, which protect us.

I was left in my cell for nine days without food. I became severely ill as a result of the beatings. A large lump appeared in my abdomen, and I had acute head injuries. The prison hospital suggested my abdominal lump be operated on,
but divinations done on my behalf at Sera and Drepung monasteries warned me against the operation. After two years of continuous beatings, underfeeding, and forcible blood extractions, my body was weakened to the point of near-death. I suppose the Chinese officials wanted to avoid the embarrassment of having me die in prison, so they released me. I was placed in the Tibetan Medicine Hospital, where I remained bedridden, shaking constantly from exhaustion and nerve damage. I couldn’t walk for the first two months, but soon after began to walk with the assistance of two others, one on each arm, until I learned to walk on my own and was sent home. I had gone to prison at the age of 18 and I was 20 by then. I had been a nun for only six months when I was arrested.

After spending four days at home, I returned to Lhasa where I stayed with an old monk I had known in prison. After two months, I was able to arrange my escape into exile in India. I left with another nun from Chubsang who had also been in prison. Now I wish I could return to Tibet again. I would like to help to free Tibet from the oppression of the Chinese occupation. I was not schooled well as a child, so I cannot help much as a scholar or teacher. I feel the best way I can assist my people is through political activities. Until Tibet is freed, our religion, culture, and people are threatened. I pray that my actions might in some way serve as an example to younger Tibetans to find courage in the face of oppression.

C. Ngawang Sangdrol, the nun who never made it to Dolma Ling:

URGENT ACTION APPEAL: Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, Dharamsala
Date: August 3, 1999

IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF NGAWANG SANGDROL
The Longest serving female political prisoner in Tibet
Ngawang Sangdrol, serving 17 years' imprisonment in Drapchi Prison, had her sentence extended for the third time in October 1998 by the Intermediate Municipal Court of Lhasa, bringing her total sentence to 21 years. She is the longest serving female political prisoner in Tibet.

According to a reliable source, Ngawang Sangdrol's sentence was increased by four years due to her participation in the May 1 and 4, 1998 prisoner protests at Drapchi Prison. Earlier reports indicate that since the protests in May last year Ngawang Sangdrol and another nun, Ngawang Choezom from Chubsang Nunnery were subjected to harsh treatment and were placed in solitary confinement. Sangdrol was suspected as a "ring leader" by Chinese authorities and singled out for ill treatment. Following the Drapchi incidence, 11 prisoners were reported to have died.

Ngawang Sangdrol's prison sentence had previously been prolonged by the Intermediate Municipal Court of Lhasa in October 1993 and July 1996. Born in 1977, Ngawang Sangdrol, now 22 year-old was from Garu Nunnery. She was first arrested when she was only ten years old in 1987 for participating in a demonstration and was detained for 15 days. On August 28, 1990, at the age of 13, she again joined a demonstration led by nuns from Norbulingkha in Lhasa. She was considered too young to be tried that time and was detained for nine months without charge. On June 17, 1992, at the age of 15, she had originally been sentenced to three years for attempting to stage a demonstration in Lhasa along with other nuns from Garu Nunnery. She was then charged of "subversive and separatist" activities.

While in Drapchi, Sangdrol's sentence was extended by six years on October 8, 1993 on charges of "spreading counter-revolutionary propaganda." Along with thirteen other nuns, she was accused of recording independence songs and poems on a tape recorder and smuggling it outside the prison. In July 1996, her sentence was further extended by eight years for shouting "Free Tibet" while she and other nuns were made to stand in rain as punishment for not cleaning their prison cells. The latest extension of her prison sentence brought her current sentence to 21 years.

Article 69 of the Chinese Penal Code clearly stipulates that the maximum sentence of fixed-term imprisonment cannot exceed 20 years. By extending Sangdrol's prison sentence to 21 years, China has violated its own law. The Chinese authorities have also violated the Article 17 of the Chinese Penal Code, which states that minors below the age of 16 will not be held responsible for their infraction. Sangdrol was only 15 years old when she was arrested and sentenced to 3 years on June 17, 1992 on charges of "counter-revolutionary" activities. Her younger brother, Jamphel Tenzin who resides in India, testifies her year of birth as 1977.

Ngawang Sangdrol (lay name: Rigchog) continues to be subjected to harsh treatment. She was placed in solitary confinement on two occasions in March 1996 (6 mo. and 10 days) and after the prisoner protests in Drapchi Prison in May 1998. Sangdrol's prison mate, Lobsang Dolma, who spent 5 years in Drapchi Prison with her, reported that she has suffered for long a time from a kidney problem but was allowed for treatment only in a prison clinic. She is made to weave wool and is never allowed outside prison to work. Ngawang Sangdrol is now due to be released in the year 2013 at the age of 36. By that time she will have spent 21 years of her prime life in prison.

**Recommended Action:**

Please send telegrams/telexes/express/airmail letters to your governments and the PRC officials:

- To rectify China's illegal sentencing of Ngawang Sangdrol by releasing her from prison;
- Demanding an immediate end to the brutal ill-treatment of Ngawang Sangdrol and other prisoners who were involved in the peaceful protests of 1 and 4 May 1998 in Drapchi Prison;
- Urging that the political prisoners receive full and appropriate medical treatment;
- Urging a full and impartial investigation into the deaths of 11 political prisoners at Drapchi.
D. **Kunsang Dolma:** Most Dolma Ling nuns came into exile as educational rather than political refugees; they came to study and practice Buddhism free of interference from the state. Many nuns have been expelled from their nunneries in Tibet, and even when a nun is able to secure a position, there are strict limitations on the contents and forms of her monastic education and religious practice. Since 1996, state interference in monastic education has been vastly accelerated with a “re-education program” in which nunneries and monasteries have been subjected to intense “patriotic” (i.e. Chinese) re-education sessions on a regular basis. Many of the “patriotic” doctrines are in direct conflict with their religious education, as in the case of students being asked to denounce HH the Dalai Lama if he is their root lama.

Kunsang Dolma is a nun who sought refuge at Dolma Ling for educational purposes. Yet, in reading her story, it becomes apparent that politics and education cannot be easily separated in Tibet. She is from one of the principal nunneries in Lhasa, Tsamgyu Nunnery, a renowned institution that has been in operations for hundreds of years. Accordingly, soon after she arrived at Dolma Ling, Kunsang Dolma became the chanting master of the nunnery and took up responsibilities as a Tibetan language teacher. Compared to most of other nuns, she received fairly extensive education in Tibet. These days she has joined Osel Khargyen at the dialectics and teacher-training program near the city of Kangra.

I began my formal education in Tibet when I was eight years old at a local school, transferring soon afterwards to the regional program for more advanced studies. We had classes in Tibetan, Chinese, Math, Music, and gym with both Tibetan and Chinese teachers. I finished school at the age of 13, joining my
parents to assist them with the farm. When I was 16 or 17 years old, I began to consider becoming a nun. My primary motivation was to try to repay the kindness of my parents. Finally, at 18 years of age, I made my decision and left for Lhasa. I joined Tsamgyu Ani Gompa, a nunnery in south Lhasa.

In 1990, the year I left Tibet, there were 90 nuns at Tsamgyu. About half of those nuns were actively demonstrating for a free Tibet. I joined two such demonstrations in the Barkhor [a square] in front of the Jokhang temple in Lhasa. On December 10th HH the Dalai Lama was to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Like everywhere else in Tibet, at Tsamgyu we planned to celebrate by singing and making offerings. The Chinese arrived on December 9th and forbade us to celebrate, leaving three guards to enforce the order. We had already prepared Juniper branches to burn as offerings for the occasion. So, the following morning we went ahead with the puja, throwing barley flour in the air, burning the Juniper, and singing the Tibetan independence song ‘Tsema Yonten.’ Then we moved into a smaller shrine room dedicated to the protector deities.

Soon Chinese soldiers began arriving in truckloads; they were everywhere, filling up the courtyard of the nunnery. They began shouting commands at us through megaphones, and locked us inside the small shrine room. They then interrogated each nun individually, taking our photographs and names. I escaped the ordeal by hiding inside the shrine room. They expelled our 17 most senior nuns, the principal teachers and mentors of the nunnery, even though none of them had been politically active. Then the Chinese began daily re-education sessions in communist doctrine. That’s when I decided to leave Tibet. Without teachers our
nunnery was decapitated. The re-education sessions left little time for our Buddhist studies and practices. I felt that the only way I could be a true Tibetan Buddhist nun was to go into exile. So, that is what I resolved to do.

That meant leaving my family as well, of course. My brother had already died in 1987 helping the victims of a demonstration receive medical treatment. He was shot in the neck. Although I miss my family, I feel I can help them most by being a good nun; for now, I can best achieve that here in India. We have good food and educational opportunities here. We study Tibetan, English, and Buddhist dialectics, including lengthy debate sessions. In this sense, I am very happy here in India, and grateful to HH the Dalai Lama. Yet, the knowledge I have of the suffering of the Tibetan people inside Tibet gnaws at me and makes it very difficult to find mental peace while in India. I am saddened to think that the Potala waits for the return of HH the Dalai Lama yet he is unable to live there.

When I was in Tibet, we heard that HH the Dalai Lama said that it is not Tibetan independence that is in question so much as how to secure and preserve such independence once it is achieved. For that, our educational facilities and opportunities must be greatly enhanced. I would like to assist in that process. I am beginning by obtaining the best education possible. Then, I hope to be able to help in Tibet in by sharing my knowledge and experience.

E. The Lithang nuns:

The nuns from Lithang, about 40 in all, come from a very different geographical, political, and even cultural milieu than the nuns profiled so far. Some told me they rarely
if ever saw Chinese people during their years growing up in the villages or nomadic communities of this region in southeastern Tibet (part of present-day Sichuan province). Tibetans in these areas, especially in the nomadic communities, are given sections of territory that are off-limits to tourists and travelers. Two nuns from this region described seeing their first Westerner ("Ingie") when they were teenagers, and running home in terror at the sight of the alien white skin and red or blond hair. Village elders told them they had seen people from the West, and in both cases, the elders reassured them they had nothing to fear. In general, I found these nuns to be much less traumatized or politicized than those from the Lhasa area. Many became very dedicated students and debaters.

This is their account of the remarkable odyssey that took them from the lush mountains of Lithang to the fertile Kangra Valley where they now reside at Dolma Ling:

In the third month after the Tibetan New Year of 1988, we left the Drokpa region of Lithang in eastern Tibet for a prostration pilgrimage initiated and organized by a monk named Yonten Phuntsok. Many of us were cousins, and some sisters and brothers, and we all took novitiate vows as monks or nuns before embarking on the journey. We were ordained by Tenzin Delek Rinpoche who had returned to his monastery in our district after spending many years in exile in India. We all carry the first name "Delek" in recognition of this ordination lama.

We were a combination of lay people, monks, and nuns, from nomadic or semi-nomadic families. By the time we reached central Lithang, we numbered over 120. Our daily regime was to wake at 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning to carry our possessions to the site of our destination for that day. Then we would backtrack to our previous camp and begin the prostrations. To protect our bodies,
we put pieces of wood with straps on our hands and leather or tough vinyl on our chest. We prostrated all year long, even in winter. We prostrated in the rain and in the slush; we only stopped for snow, waiting until it cleared to begin again. We had three meals a day. Every evening, the older lay people recited mantra while the younger people held pujas or attended religious teachings and debates. All the young women on the pilgrimage were ordained, and we joined in the same religious exercises as the monks.

Our destination was Lhasa, the traditional end of most pilgrimages in Tibet, along with Kang Rinpoche (Mount Kailash). We Tibetans have had this pilgrimage route and practice for many generations. The Jokhang Temple in the Barkhor inside Lhasa is considered the holiest place in Tibet, and that is why we go there. When we arrived in the outskirts of Lhasa, Yonten Phutsok Rinpoche went ahead to clear our passage in the capital city. We had obtained a permit, so we didn’t anticipate any problems. It turned out that we were mistaken in that assumption. Yonten Puntsok was stopped at a bridge close to Lhasa called Lhasa Kuru bridge. It is east of Lhasa, and from its height you can see the Potala. We were detained for the entire day. The Chinese guards took our names and photos; then, by nightfall, they let us go. There were demonstrations in Lhasa at the time, and so we were unable to get clearance to pass through that checkpoint on the bridge over the Lhasa river. I can’t tell you how disappointed we were; for nearly two years we had held the hope of one day seeing the Jokhang, and once there we were denied entrance to finish the last several miles of our pilgrimage.
We were told to go to Shigatse to complete our journey, and the officials told us we could return to Lhasa later. We were taken to Shigatse in trucks. The trucks had been lent to us in Markham, donated by a wealthy businessman to help carry our supplies while we prostrated. Now they carried us to Shigatse instead. After two days in Shigatse, we decided to make a pilgrimage to Kang Rinpoche (Mount Kailash) as it was nearby. Once there, most of us determined that the best choice remaining to us was to seek exile in India with HH the Dalai Lama. So, the trucks returned home carrying the old and the infirm, while the rest of us carried on from Tso Maphum (‘Blue Lake’) on the outskirts of Mount Kailash through to the Nepalese border and beyond to Kathmandu. We took back roads, and the journey lasted about 25 days, entirely on foot.

We crossed into Nepal at an obscure border area to avoid the guards and police. We were forewarned that Nepalese guards would turn us into the Chinese if we were caught, who in turn would arrest us. So, we traveled by night and during the day stuck to the mountains when we did travel. We sold clothes for food, and begged from nomads and families along the way. When we arrived in Kathmandu, we stayed in hostels for new-arrivals from Tibet sponsored by the Tibetan government in exile. They also provided us with much needed medical attention. Then, in December 1990 we had the good fortune to attend the Kalachakra in Sarnath, India, where HH the Dalai Lama provided us with accommodations.

Since then we have come to Dharamsala and have been well cared for thanks to the kindness of HH the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan refugee community, the
Tibetan Nuns’ Project, and all our friends from around the world. We are studying Buddhist philosophy, dialectics and debate, the Tibetan language and English. [This was in 1992; since then, the curriculum has been expanded.] All of us live at Dolma Ling now; we number about 40 nuns and constitute almost half the enrollment at the nunnery. In Tibet we were happy but we could never have learned to read and to write, study Buddhism and dialectics, nor English. Some of us are even trained in health care now. Our lives are richer for our studies and new friends, but we all feel sad when we think of our families back in Tibet. When we feel homesick, we remind ourselves that some day we will return and help build a new Dolma Ling, or its equivalent, in Lithang. We hope that it will endure for many generations to come.

II. Experience:

From these few narratives, it should be apparent that the nuns’ life stories offer incidents of great valor, suffering, sadness, and accomplishment. As extreme as these experiences may seem, they are seldom referred to in the daily life of the nunnery or in the curriculum. They are not discussed in the debates, the Buddhist philosophy classes, nor in their secular-based coursework. This is the principal question with which I begin this analysis: How is it that some much of the nuns’ experiences are not directly discussed or represented in their education? I admit that I enter this with the bias of a culture that believes trauma to have a lasting effect mitigated principally through talking about or representing the originary trauma. Yet, the nuns who were imprisoned and tortured do not suffer the degree of distress one would predict from their past histories, in
spite of the fact that few have received much if any trauma counseling. When they have, it was more for diplomatic reasons, to accommodate Western funding agencies like WHO, for instance, than for any sincere belief in the efficacy of therapeutic approaches to healing—that is, the talking cure. Neither the nuns nor administration expressed or demonstrated much interest in participating in such programs. In spite of the relative neglect of such therapeutic approaches, the nuns are remarkably well-adjusted. This is particularly interesting given I can attest to the fact that many former prisoners suffered from severe post-traumatic stress disorder in the years following their arrival in India as refugees. Part of this resilience, I believe, can be understood in light of the Buddhist perspective on experience.

To appreciate direct experience and its impact on education, it is helpful to clarify what is meant by “experience.” To do so, we need to distance ourselves from the conventional use of the concept to some extent—to make it strange—because its very familiarity makes it difficult to discuss. …If I were to say the word “bear,” I don’t think you will have much reaction except perhaps to conjure up an image of a bear—anything from a stuffed teddy like Winnie-the-Pooh to a fierce polar or grizzly bear. On the other hand, if you are walking in the woods and a bear confronts you, your adrenaline rushes, your heart pounds, your muscles ready and your attention rivets. So, there is clearly this difference between the concept and the actual experience of beararness that evoke very different responses from us. Furthermore, from this example, we can appreciate that experience has something to do with the body and the senses; it is somehow more real. On a deeper, analytical level, experience is the hallmark of consciousness; it is the sign of being alive, the sign of existence and sentience.
According to Buddhist teachings on consciousness, direct experience is a phenomenon that depends on a series of five factors to manifest. The five components or aggregates of experience are: 1) bodily forms (form), 2) sensation, 3) ideas (conceptions), 4) emotion (feeling), and 5) consciousness. Experience is constructed through the interaction between these aggregates. These five factors are present in all experience, even when in ordinary activities it appears united by the sense of "self." If analysed, this "self" cannot be found to exist outside of one of the five. Indeed, one key component of analytical meditation on emptiness (as selflessness) is to reflect on how the self cannot be found in exclusively one, all, or none of the aggregates. Furthermore, notice that experience tends to have an emotional component, even the experience of something as seemingly neutral as a colour. Such emotions fall under three overall categories: positive, negative, and neutral. Concepts or ideas are also involved, such that a name or designation is considered to be implicit in any experience of consciousness.

The direct experience of emptiness is the possible exception insofar as the perception involved in that experience is called "yogic" and is free of all ordinary conceptions and consciousness; however, the key insight of the Mahayana system of Buddhism is that emptiness and form are indistinguishable. It might be likened to the immanence of God, so long as God is understood in the Hebraic sense of beyond name or form (that is, free of any sense of a permanent "self," personality, or form.) All form shares this fundamental nature—that is, lacking a fundamental nature! This paradox is reiterated in one of the principal Mahayana texts on emptiness or wisdom, called the Heart Sutra: "All emptiness is form; all form emptiness." The Vajrayana path is designed to enact the transmutation of all five of the aggregates (form or body, feelings,
consciousness, mental formations or concepts, and perceptions) into purified forms imbued with pristine awareness. In doing so, experience is transformed into something that is continuously perceived as both empty and full of bliss. A parallel may be drawn with the idea of heaven-on-Earth, or, as Emily Dickinson (1991) put it, more poetically: “Who has not found the heaven below / Will fail of it above. / God’s residence is next to mine, / His furniture is love” (p. 224). In a similar way, the path to Buddhahood in Vajrayana is immanent and transformative rather than transcendental, just as a Buddha is an embodiment of enlightened human nature and not the transcendence of it. The five aggregates constitute the human body-mind, and like all nature they are constantly changing and capable of evolving; it is our preconceptions that render the illusion of their stability and fixity.

This is not to say that the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness posits all experience and existence as illusory. Rather, what is illusory about experience is only that part that deceives us into believing it exists independently and inherently. Things appear to us in ordinary experience in a way that does not hold up on analysis, in a similar manner to a rainbow seeming to be a concrete phenomenon until we study how it is constituted by molecules of water and sunlight combining with our own position and perception. It arises interdependently from its parts (various wavelengths of light as colour), causes (water molecules and light), and designation by a consciousness (without which colours would not be perceived nor labeled, nor would a “rainbow” be designated as such.) So, the realization of emptiness is the realization of interdependence; the two realizations are simultaneous. To realize the interdependence of a phenomenon is to realize its emptiness.
As indicated in the example of a rainbow, the idea of interdependence in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism is founded on the premise that things and selves arise in dependence on three factors: 1) causes and conditions, 2) parts and wholes, and 3) imputation by names (consciousness). Take, for example, the experience of red. We can say that it arises in dependence on the following causes and conditions: 1) functioning visual sensory and perceptual organs, 2) a particular wavelength of light associated with the experience of red, and 3) a human consciousness that designates red as distinct from green or pink. If someone is color blind, they lack the necessary conditions to have the experience of red (that is, visual sensory and perceptual apparatus). Furthermore, red as a wavelength of light is part of a larger whole, that being the spectrum of light, while itself a whole constituted of photons, a wavelength, and consciousness as its parts. Finally, “red” arises as a meaningful experience through being conceptually designated as a primary colour, distinct from, say, purple and orange, by a human consciousness. The term elicits memories and associations that combine to condition our experience of red—our positive, neutral, or negative feelings, for instance.

Just as our experience of phenomena are understood to arise interdependently, based on our sense spheres, cognitive bases, and consciousness, so do our experiences of persons, including our experience of our own sense of self and identity, which arises in dependence on the aggregates and on our relationships with others. As HH the Dalai Lama (1999) explains:

Whereas a pot is something concrete we can actually point to, the self is more elusive: its identity as a construct quickly becomes evident. We come to see that the habitual sharp distinction we make between “self” and “others” is an
exaggeration. ...It is also hard to see how the self could exist as an independent phenomenon outside of the mind-body aggregate. Again, this suggests to me that our habitual notion of self is in some sense a label for a complex web of interrelated phenomena. (p. 42-43)

A crucial question to pose at this juncture, then, is whether experience can be posited prior to, or outside of, linguistic and sensory conditioning at all. Or, as Agamben (1993) poses: “Does a mute experience exist, does an infancy [in-fancy] of experience exist? And, if it does, what is its relationship to language?” In addressing this question, the author alludes to European philosophical efforts to define pure experience earlier in the 20th century, such as Bergson’s notion of “pure duration” and Dilthey’s Erlebnis with its “lived experience.” These philosophers opposed Kant’s notion of inner experience as bereft of cognitive value and a “rhapsody of perception” (Agamben, p. 35-37). Instead, they proposed the existence of a continuum of consciousness distinct from though related to a continuum of matter. Tibetan Buddhism holds a similar view but refutes any attempt to essentialize the continuum, experience, or consciousness itself—all phenomena lack inherent existence, including the lack of inherent existence itself (hence phenomena can equally be asserted to exist interdependently as empty).

I posed the question of the existence of unconditioned or pure experience to HH the Dalai Lama in 1997. He responded that Buddhism does accept the existence of such experience, unconditioned by tendencies of attraction, repulsion, and neutrality, and that such an experience can be directly known; however, he pointed out that this was not to be mistaken for Buddhism per se. Buddhism is the path to such experience, but (similar to science) is itself founded on the acceptance of causality and the conditioning of
phenomenal experience. In this respect, Buddhism is both a system of mind science and of education, which supports the development of a human being towards the re/experience of such an unconditioned state. Although the state is natural, it is not apparent in ordinary consciousness and so one finds a path to such an experience. The reason to bother is that the knowledge and realizations that accompany such an experience bring happiness and liberation from suffering. In this respect and rather paradoxically, the direct experience of this unconditioned state, characterized as clear and knowing (the Tibetan Buddhist definition of pure or infant experience), is itself a cause and condition of freedom.

III. Liminal experiences: Suffering, bliss, and death

My Mind

My mind,
Contented in deep sleep
Wanders to the realm of dreams--
The birds are singing,
The sun shines across the land.
Don't go to the realm of dream and deep sleep
My mind.
Breath the fresh air of the morning,
Today's priceless jewel.
The petals of the flowers open.
Their scent spreads across the land.
Open your eyes and look around you.

Palden Gyal, Xining, 3 April, 1988

In ordinary experience, especially “modern” experience, direct perception and conceptual thought (as conditioned by language) are so thoroughly mixed as to appear indistinguishable and impossible to untangle. It is only when experiences defy the limits of representation that direct perception and conceptual thought unravel and their
difference becomes more apparent. Such liminal experiences generally involve extremes of: 1) suffering, 2) bliss, and/or 3) death. The more intense such experiences are, the less able we are to conceptualize, categorize, generalize, and hence represent them. They become, in short, difficult to talk about. Accordingly, they resist rational and logical analyses and explanations, and, in pushing reason to its limit, threaten its apparent powers of consistency, representation and order. It is for this reason, I contend, that such liminal experiences tend to be marginalized, ignored, or even actively suppressed within rational systems of education like science (for example, medicine and economics) and dialectical debate. This is so in spite of the fact that these experiences bring us close to what it means to be alive, human, and sentient, and hence are in such need of our collective and personal attentions. They are more amenable to being represented narratively or poetically, but even there resist telling. Not only are they partially hidden to language, they are also partially hidden to ordinary sensory experience, where we often live oblivious of suffering, bliss and death. Accordingly, there is in such liminal experiences something of a secret...a mystery (from Greek muein meaning to close the eyes or mouth)—something unseen and unsayable.

A. Suffering:

"I teach only suffering and the transformation of suffering."
Sakyamuni Buddha

The life stories of the nuns of Dolma Ling present common themes that focus on struggles with suffering and the desire for freedom. Their suffering is unusual in its intensity and severity, involving experiences many would find intolerable. Torture in particular represents a liminal extreme of suffering, both for the degree of its pain but
also because it is difficult for us to understand suffering based solely on the infliction of pain by one human being on another. That the Tibetan nuns would knowingly and willingly submit to such experience as an act of political and social responsibility makes such pain even more difficult to comprehend. Here, it is helpful to consider that Buddhism conceives of the suffering of pain as only the crudest manifestation of suffering. Indeed, all experience short of liberation, whether negative, neutral or positive, involves suffering; if not the suffering of pain, then the suffering of change or the suffering of suffering, if one has not cleared the misperception of inherent existence.

Agamben (1993) contends that as an infant body gives rise to an adult human being, so does a mute, pure, infant experience give rise to the experience of being human. This parallels the Buddhist view that experience (or consciousness) progresses in a causal, developmental relationship, though in Buddhism great effort is made to reinforce that such a continuum or developmental “consciousness” arises interdependently and is free of inherent or essential existence. Implicit in this infant experience, according to Agamben, is the suffering or pathema of “the anticipation of death”—that is, the knowledge that experience will be interrupted in some final way. This primordial intuition of suffering and death is the basis, he contends, of the Western Mysteries (such as Pythagoras’ cult of the 6th century). Like Tantric Buddhism, these are secret traditions (that is, un-speakable, mute, “from mu the moaning sound when the mouth is closed”). “If it is true that in its primary form, what was at the heart of the experience of the mysteries was not a knowing, but a suffering, … and if this pathema was in its essence abstracted from language—was an un-speakable, a closed-mouthed moaning—then this experience approximated an experience of infancy” (p. 60-61).
It is the imperative to speak this experience, this silence, that is the impetus behind the very experience of being human: "The silence of the mystery is undergone as a rupture, plunging man back into the pure, mute language of nature; but as a spell, silence must eventually be shattered and conquered" (p. 61). Accordingly, Agamben claims it is the narrative or fable, rather than the mystery (mute, mathematical), "which contains the truth of infancy as man's source of origin" (p. 61). Like the Buddhist view, Agamben suggests that experience can be educated through cultivating qualities of awareness and the languages used to represent them. Furthermore, this view suggests that to be meaningful to humanity, formal education take on the subject of experience, both as a curricular content and as a process of learning. Finally, as I have tried to argue and perform in the writing of this text, it suggests the creative and hermeneutical value of bringing discourses of logic and reason into closer dialogue, or at least proximity, with narrative discourses. While the "mute" language of logic opens the mysteries of what is not apparent in unanalyzed experience, certain narrative formats and languages offer greater insight into experiences otherwise silenced under the "secrecy" of the mystery. This recognition of two modes of processing knowledge, the logical and the narrative, has been researched, described, and written about at length by Bruner (1986, 1996).

The intuition of freedom arises from an experience of suffering, where freedom begins as an inference. It comes with the thought that one's experience could be different, that the suffering could cease, that it is somehow not as inevitable and irrevocable as it may seem. There arises a radical intuition that, though one suffers in the present moment, a state could exist free of such suffering. The difficulty is that the realization of such freedom requires one turn attention and awareness on suffering itself.
to gain insight into its nature, yet there is a tendency to avoid and divert attention away from such an awareness of primordial suffering and experience—to repress or deny it. Accordingly, Buddhist rituals and meditations are designed to assist one to sustain attention on suffering and not to swoon out of such experiences in fantasy or discursive thought. As in the poem “My Mind” that begins this section, there is in Buddhism a call to awaken to an awareness of oppression because therein lies, paradoxically, the path to primordial bliss—the secret or mystery. The poet asks the assumed reader (that is, Tibetans) not to go “to the realm of dreams” but to “breathe the fresh air of the morning. ... Open your eyes and look around you.” Awareness is the key; awareness itself is transformative.

In conditions of acute suffering we become aware of the fact that we abide in experience for the very reason that we so intensely desire to be free of it and cannot. Yet the suffering—the struggle—arises because we desire what is not then existing. If we lean instead into the very experience we feel averse to, both with awareness and with reason, then interesting things begin to happen. The “story” about our experience shifts; it turns out to be different from what it seemed. These preconceptions we project onto immediate perceptions, actions, and events can cloud the reality of what is arising in the present, and so their “stories” require constant revising. Suffering can be understood as such a story, a condition we create or project onto experience, rather than an inherent condition of an experience per se (such as, for example, the sensations associated with pain). Therefore it is the suffering that is the problem, rather than the sensations. Accordingly, for a Buddha all experience is said to arise as bliss, even those experiences others would associate with suffering. For the nuns, for instance, their pain has been a
condition and cause of personal wisdom, compassion and realization, as well as the
impetus behind much of the institutional development of Dolma Ling.

In Buddhism, recognizing suffering is a precondition for wisdom. We find many
examples of people who learn by moving from suffering to bliss in the lives of the
Buddha’s disciples, for instance, as found in the Therigatha poems (literally songs) of his
women disciples. The following is an account of Vasetthi’s experience of moving from
madness, caused by grief over the death of her child, to the happiness of meditative
realization. As Murcott (1991) points out, the auto/biographical poems of the Therigatha
are artifacts of songs kept alive during six centuries of oral transmission (p. 5).

Grief-stricken for my son,
Mad-minded, out of my senses,
I was naked with wild hair
And I wandered anywhere.

I lived on trash heaps,
In a graveyard, and by the highways.
Three years’ wandering, starved and thirsty.
Then in the city of Mithila
I saw the one who tames what is untamed
and goes his way in happiness,
enlightened, unafraid.

I came to my senses,
paid homage, and sat down.

Out of compassion,
Gautama [Buddha] taught me the way.
When I heard his words
I set out into homelessness.
By putting his teachings into practice,
I realized great joy.

My grief is cut out,
Finished, ended,
for I have understood the ground
from which all grief comes. (p. 84)
B. Bliss:  

When I realized the ending of suffering had been experienced, seeing, understanding, insight, wisdom, and light arose in me with regard to things I had not heard before.

Sakyamuni Buddha, 500 BCE

Just imagine it, the possibility of an end to suffering! O, your cynicism might well balk and ask how it is possible. After all, no system can eradicate illness, old age, and death, and, as Christ said, “The poor will always be with us.” Yes, but what is it of these experiences that render them conditions of suffering? Are they inherently states of suffering, or is suffering something that arises with them from some other cause? We might begin by asking why we fear poverty, old age, sickness and death? Why do we resist them and cling to the desire to be outside such experiences? Of course, testimonials from people claiming to be free of suffering may not convey the deepest sense of confidence in the reader. Yet, if we accept my claim that suffering and bliss (i.e. the cessation of suffering) are difficult to discuss outside of such narratives, then perhaps there is reason to attend. Certainly most of us have enjoyed at least some experience of bliss, and these serve as the basis for our ability to intuit others—sexual experiences, for example, or delicious meals, encounters with nature, great works of art, intuitions of places like heaven or possibly an imagined future. All these suggest some deep well of knowledge of the possibility...even promise...of bliss.

Western commentators commonly remark on the happiness of the Tibetan people, especially given the adverse nature of their current circumstances. Of course, all human beings and societies know suffering and sadness, but it is important at least to consider the possibility that certain societies and cultures may have greater knowledge of the causes and conditions for human happiness and realization than others. Take, for example, Yeshe Tsogyal, one of the first students of Buddhism in Tibet and a key figure...
in establishing the Vajrayana Buddhist lineage in Tibet. Her youth was plagued by great personal struggles to resist arranged marriages and the violent abuse of potential suitors, until she was finally given to the king, who in turn “gave” her to Padmasambhava, the great Indian Tantric adept. In spite of facing further challenges like rape and public rejection in succeeding years, she testified to having found great happiness in life. In the following terma poem attributed to her, she speaks as a dakini (sky-goer), equating herself (via the author) with the experience of Bliss and Voidness itself (Changchub & Nyingpo, 1999):

Listen to me well, all you assembled here;
Turn your minds and ears to my voice!

Rejoice with me; there is no need for sadness.
Life is but a meeting of contingent elements,
It cannot last forever.
The objects of our senses, mere perception,
Have no being in themselves.
The path, too, is illusion;
It is not the truth.
The ground
Is the intrinsic way of being,
It is not a thing.
The mind is only thoughts,
Having neither base nor root.
Something real and solid I have never seen!
Faithful brothers, faithful sisters, gathered here,
Pray steadily to me who am your mother.
Blessed in the Great Bliss of the space of voidness,
You will never part from me at any time.
Those by karma linked to me
Will hence receive my guidance naturally.
Others, not excluded, will be guarded
By the emanations of my love.
Death’s sorrow will not triumph over me, your mother.
Therefore, sisters, brothers,
No need is there for grieving. (p. 166)
In Buddhism, the desire for happiness is understood to be innate—the common thread binding all sentient life. The desire to be happy and free of suffering are so fundamental as to be considered uncaused, *apriori* conditions of existence. This desire, in turn, is the basis of the Buddhist notion of universal rights and responsibilities. Just as I desire happiness and freedom from suffering, so do others. Indeed, if we investigate we find that this desire pervades the choices and hence activities of sentient beings, and may be a defining characteristic of consciousness. Indeed, building on some of the evolutionary theories of Humberto Maturana (1999), I would go so far as to contend that the pursuit of bliss is the principal mechanism by which human evolution is enacted, through such obvious influences as determining who we fall in love with, who parents our children, to more subtle effects such as our preferences for lifestyles and activities that may become with time and scope part of the “human condition.”

Agamben (1993) goes even further by suggesting that experiences of bliss are the most meaningful basis for a new concept of time. Moments of pleasure, he claims, do not reside in either linear time or eternity, but in history, in humanity’s history and the experience of infancy, as “man’s primary dimension...his original home” (p. 104-105). The story of Adam and Eve in the garden prior to the Fall depict such an originary pleasure in its fable of human origins. It is a story telling us our origins are in bliss and love. Likewise, the medieval troubadours of the South of France spoke of a similar pure pleasure residing outside of time. As in the Western Mysteries and Vajrayana Buddhist traditions, this troubadour culture appeared to be based on codes of secrecy established by secret societies—on the Courts of Love of the *courtezia* or courtly love tradition, which in turn may have been connected to the Cathars (Denis de Rougemont, 1940).
Courtezia was founded on liminal experiences of love or bliss rather than on pathema (that is, suffering), though sometimes the longing for bliss became a suffering. In Buddhism, this is corrected by conjoining experiences of voidness (as in death) with experiences of bliss. Interestingly, de Rougement indicates there may have been some connection between Vajrayana Buddhism and the courtezia tradition, for at least two notable translations of Buddhist Tantric texts are known to have made their way to Europe during the period, probably arriving with the crusaders returning from the Middle East (p. 121).

Mystical experiences are based on the experience of bliss. While the Western Enlightenment, as attested in the works of Kant discussed in earlier chapters, has tended to publicly denigrate such experiences as elitist, inaccessible, or in the more extreme instances mere psychological pathologies, there is little doubt that such experiences propel much intellectual and scientific, not just religious, endeavour. As Albert Einstein poignantly describes⁴:

The most beautiful and most profound experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the source of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling, is at the centre of true religiousness.
C. Death:

Death is the very definition of experience’s limit; indeed, it appears to be its end. As Agamben (1993) points out, there are “experiences [like death and bliss] which do not belong to us, which we cannot call ‘ours,’” but which, for this very reason, precisely because they are experiences of the inexperiencible, constitute the extreme limit against which our experience can press, straining towards death” (p. 39). In this respect, liminal experiences offer some insight into selflessness and interdependence. Yet, of all, it is death that is most silent/silenced. As Hamlet suggests, it is the silent journey without return: “The undiscover’d country, from whose bourn / No traveller returns” (III: 1). Prior to this, he parallels death with sleep—“To die, to sleep; / To sleep, perchance, to dream; ay there’s the rub, / For in that sleep of death what dreams may come / ...Must give us pause.” The difference is that we rise from sleep in the same body and memory.

Given the importance of death (to our experience of living) and its inevitability, it is rather surprising that so few scientific or scholarly efforts have yet been made to describe or understand the experience of death or to educate people about such experience. Instead, death has been medicalized, and much of the subsequent attention placed on the question of appropriate levels of morphine to administer to dying people. Such a fixation emanates from the assumption that the experience of death is painful, ignoring what can be sublime and beautiful in the experience. Furthermore, pain itself is only suffering if the consciousness experiencing such pain rejects it. It is an experience of pain, but that need not be an experience of suffering. There is a tendency to underestimate the ways in which pain can teach us, leading us to relinquish extraverted attentions and to interiorize our awareness. I am not suggesting not to make every effort
to reduce pain, but rather to untangle suffering from our understanding of both death and pain, and understand that it is suffering that is in need of being eliminated rather than pain per se (or, absurdly, death).

Although death itself may be pure silence and may appear to stand as the final limit of experience, a lot more can be said about it than has been attempted by modern education.\(^5\) It is an interesting oversight, and one worth making strange to appreciate the advantages of interrupting such silences. For, like suffering and bliss, these experiences are not as mute and inexpressible as they appear. This suggests that there are strong social forces that have contributed to the silencing of such experiences. One significant force has been the hegemony of the scientific approach to knowledge wherein such liminal experiences test the limits of its rational system of representation. In the early days of the development of science during the Enlightenment, such experiences were not denied but rather considered outside the purview of scientific inquiry because they were difficult to control and define. With time, the tendency to ignore such experiences became a cynical denial, as if such phenomena do not exist because they are not amenable to scientific analysis. Aggravating this has been the secularization of society and the shrinking role of religion, the traditional purview of such experiences, in our collective and personal lives.

It is my contention that secular society can benefit from looking to religions to help articulate secular paths to educate people in and for such experiences. In the case of Tibetan Buddhism, because it is structured as a path of learning, such an adaptation is quite easy to bring about. Death and dying pervade the analytical and meditative practices of all forms of Buddhism. In Tibetan Buddhism, in particular, great attention is
paid to the meditative art of extending awareness into the experience of death, both as an accessible method to secure a higher rebirth and, more significantly, to bring about Buddhahood. In the process, Tibetans developed a unique tradition of recognizing successive incarnations of certain reincarnate lines of lamas called tulkus so the lama can continue their teaching and other projects across lifetimes. This is, however, not to say that the new incarnation arrive with their previous personality and memory intact. While such views about rebirth are a question of belief for most people, what is significant here is that it has helped focus Tibetans’ educational, meditative, and scholarly attentions on experiences of death and dying. Nonetheless, like science, the debate program, based as it is on reason and logic, does not tend to include these rich reflections on death, which are usually based on testimonials and meditative practices. Reflections on death and dying are instead educated through less formal studies via public teachings and private readings, in Tantric meditations, and in morning and evening prayers and meditations.

IV. Educating experience:

There are two challenges we in the West face in grappling with the question of experience. First, how do we represent and communicate experience, and second, how do we educate it? If what we seek as sentient beings is happiness, and it is founded on qualities rather than particular contents of experience, then the question of how we educate experience is of deep interest to us both as individuals and collectively. While liminal experiences require our attentions, equally so do more ordinary, accessible experiences. To address the latter, we need to begin to pose questions such as: How do our senses participate in learning; how do we learn to observe and to attend to the world?
around us? What is an aesthetic experience and what is its importance in learning? What is the role of bliss and interest in learning? Some of these are addressed here; others will have to be taken up in future, by myself or others.

What is certain is that all education involves some experience, because so long as we are conscious, we are experiencing. Yet, what students actually experience in classrooms can bear little relationship to the contents of their formal, abstract lessons and curriculum. They are, nonetheless, being educated to experience the world in a particular way, one which tends to draw them out of sensory and introspective experience towards a more abstract, languaged, and social world. Accordingly, the way we educate experience is related to the way we construct our world. In Tibetan Buddhist monastic education, there are various formal approaches to the education of experience, both through analytical and more meditative methods. As mentioned, the debate program is not just about learning Buddhist concepts; it is also a way to enact and reinforce the experience of interdependence and so build a sense of community. More direct approaches to the education of experience transpire outside of the dialectical debate curriculum, in the more meditative activities conducted during and following students’ training in Buddhist logic and philosophy. I will deal with four ways in which experience is educated in Tibetan Buddhism through training students’: 1) emotions, 2) powers of reflection, 3) attention, and 4) body-mind. The first three cultivate necessary qualities for learning, that is interest, investigation, and attention, while the fourth combines the other three in an integrated system of meditative realization.
A. Educating emotions / cultivating interest: Testimony and meditation

In the liminal experiences discussed above, it may be the emotional content (that is, the feeling aggregate) in particular that resists representation. Indeed, these liminal experiences could be interpreted as extreme conditions of the three types of feelings identified in Buddhism: *suffering* as an extreme of negative feeling, *bliss* as an extreme of positive feeling, and *death* as an extreme of neutral feeling. The feeling most elevated in Buddhism is a type of equanimity founded on compassion. What “equanimity” refers to is a sense of equality or acceptance for any experience, whether it is perceived as negative, positive, or neutral, including our experiences of others. In a state of equanimity, whatever feeling state is just accepted with awareness, rather than becoming the cause for the generation of hatred, greed, or ignorance (what are referred to as The Three Poisons). When one is not trying to run away from a negative experience with aversion, towards a positive experience with greed, or away from a neutral experience with ignorance, then one can know these experiences for what they are rather than in a state of dissatisfaction or suffering. To cultivate such an awareness with such equanimity is not easy of course, and so it required some education or “drawing out.” Two effective ways to do this are from Western and Eastern practices, respectively: testimony and meditation.

1. Testimony:

In her study of emotions and education, Boler (1999) provides an account of the historical and contemporary exclusion of feelings from North American classrooms. She concludes that the most efficacious way to open an ethical space for emotions and the expression of feelings in education is through testimonials. Boler understands testimony
as “a discursive process in defiance of closure,” and testimonial listening and reading as that which “recognizes its own limits, obstacles, ignorances, and zones of numbness, and in so doing offers an ally to truth’s representational crisis” (p. 189-170). She explains, “The notion of testimony as an attempt to represent, as Felman says, ‘events in excess of our frame of reference’ refers back to the idea that such histories as the Holocaust must retain an unimaginable status” (p. 169).

Testimonial narratives of liminal experience provide a way to represent such experiential extremes in educational contexts that might otherwise be neglected in analytical, rational, or even highly aestheticized discourses. Testimonials, as an ethical means to represent and witness liminal and other experiences (Simon and Eppert, 1996), serve to address what Felman (1992) refers to as the “crisis of truth,” and Boler (1999) as “truth’s representational crisis.” This crisis is both personal and collective, and has arisen from the combined effects of historical and social trauma, the inability to represent such trauma, and the effects the ensuing silence has exerted on contemporary experience. Felman (1992) claims that, “testimony responds to the crisis of truth by ‘exceeding the facts’” (p. 5). People cannot, after all, live in a fact, but they do live in experience. The difference between a fact and an experience is that an experience is always greater than a fact, and so can never be represented well by it. Instead, we need a way to represent experience that can be conveyed as necessarily greater than fact—that is, testimony.

Testimonials represent liminal experience through acts of bearing witness, where experience is able to retain some aspect of its “unimaginable” qualities. This requires that both those giving testimony and those listening/reading be educated in how to fulfill their role in such learning. It is insufficient that the listener assumes the role of a
spectator (that is, as if to a spectacle, something looked at not heard), they must themselves be a witness. As Boler (1999) suggests, “The absence of a listener, or a listener who turns away or doubts, can shatter testimony’s potential as a courageous act in truth’s moment of crisis” (p. 168). An act of testimony asks a listener to witness suffering by opening their hearts and attention to the possibility of changing their preconceptions and understanding of the world. Knowing that mere words cannot convey the experience being communicated, one nonetheless allows the testimony of another’s experience to enter one’s world and thereby to alter it. In this way, testimony is a strategy to begin speaking the unspeakable, to begin hearing what cannot be heard.

Levinas (1969) articulates a path of testimony and testimonial listening as ethically superior to that of mere dialogue, especially when involving liminal experiences. In dialogue there is an assumption of some degree of equality and reciprocity that may be impossible when one member of a conversation has knowledge of a type of suffering, bliss, or encounter with death dramatically unfamiliar to the other. This can transpire within conversations between students and teachers, between two cultures, or more unidirectionally between authors and readers. It calls us to attend to the limits of our ability to know another’s experience through the filter of our own experience. As Simon and Eppert (1996) suggest, “It is the confrontation with such limits wherein lies the possibility of experiencing what Levinas [1969, 73] refers to as the ‘traumatism of astonishment,’ and the experience of something absolutely foreign which may call what I know and how I know into question” (p. 7). For learning and ethical communication to transpire across such a divide, it is necessary to stand at the gate of the limit of our own understanding and attend to the empty, open space of unknowing that is
the encounter with radical otherness. This is not only the basis of an ethical pattern of teaching, hearing, reading, learning, and witnessing memory in education, it is the basis for a more ethical and educational pattern of cross-cultural exchange.

Traditionally, most testimonials in Tibetan Buddhist literature have focused on liminal experiences of bliss connected with the autobiographies of great spiritual teachers. These texts tend to be found in the Tantric body of literature, where rational rules concerning validation and explanation give way to more poetic and inspirational representations in an attempt to convey the unusual meditative experiences of bliss and emptiness associated with Tantric meditation. In more recent years, a strong tradition of bearing witness has emerged in the political struggles of Tibetans to regain control of their country as well. Such testimonials tend to be enacted before Western media and audiences, and offer an important avenue for healing some of the pain of those who have undergone imprisonment and torture. It is not only the telling but the belief that the stories will assist Tibet’s plight for greater self-determination that give these testimonials such healing efficacy. There is no accommodation for testimonials in the traditional rational debate curriculum. As in the West where such experiences have tended to be ignored in the traditional rational organization of disciplines, the modern experience of Tibetans has brought with it the need to find new avenues to represent personal suffering.

2. Meditation:

It is interesting to note that Western scholarship has responded to the current “crisis of truth” by articulating yet another way to represent knowledge—testimonials—with little attempt to consider the benefits of reflecting on experience directly without resort to representation whatsoever. Meditation offers a promising complement to
“talking cures” that need not involve the mediation of language and the involvement of others. In Buddhist education, one approaches liminal experiences principally through meditative introspection, which may or may not involve analyses mediated by language and reason. (Analytical meditations are used to develop inferences about emptiness, and to overcome sufferings related to arrogance and anger and thereby to cultivate compassion.) Boler (1999) provides some explanation of the modern, Western neglect of contemplation and meditation when she cautions that reflection can lead to passivity in the face of others’ suffering and to one’s own complicity in such suffering—what in Buddhism is referred to as “quietism.”

The Socratic admonition to “know thyself” may not lead to self-transformation. Like passive empathy, self-reflection in and of itself may result in no measurable change or good to others or oneself. The familiar call for critical self-reflection can easily be reduced to a form of solipsism, a kind of “new age,” liberal navel-gazing. ... In contrast to the admonition to “know thyself,” collective witnessing is always understood in relation to others, and in relation to personal and cultural histories and material conditions. (p. 178)

While concern about quietism with respect to meditation is valid, without the wisdom gained through reflection and meditation, our actions are easily misguided away from our intentions, or we sacrifice our own happiness and wellbeing in the illusion that we are helping others by doing so. This makes us prone to bitterness at the loss of our own happiness, a bitterness we tend to share with others, regardless of our noble intentions. Furthermore, to learn to witness collectively with awareness of one’s relations to others in the way Boler (1999) and Felman (1992) advocate requires the interruption of
subtle assumptions of self-centredness that are not easily recognized without deep reflection and analysis. These are the pitfalls of unreflective activism and emotional expression. Meditation and introspection can correct such errors through systematic reflection and the cultivation of a wisdom realizing emptiness (that is, of inherent existence.) Such wisdom brings certain knowledge that we and all phenomena exist interdependently, and this certainty in turn becomes the cause of the great compassion and motivation required to realize such wisdom through both witnessing and acting on behalf of others. For representation alone cannot serve as an antidote to our current crises because conceptual knowledge, even that “exceeding the facts,” cannot secure personal and social transformation without a corresponding transformation of the way we experience the world and one another. While an aspect of the way, testimonies alone are insufficient. The ‘witness’ is, after all, at least in my judgement, first and foremost the one who was “there”—the one who directly experiences the liminal event.

“Meditation” refers to any systematic attempt to examine or enhance awareness of processes of consciousness (that is, of experience). The process of examination can be conceptual (that is, analytical) or direct (as in mindfulness or Tantric meditation) in nature. The former are called analytical meditations, referring to any form of introspective reflection. The more direct meditations cultivate a special quality of awareness, which is calm, blissful and concentrated, and it is that quality of experience that combines with the analytically-trained mind to investigate emptiness and the nature of mind and existence. Such meditations are readily adaptable to formal educational contexts with a systematic method that is accessible to anyone. These meditations promote peace, wellbeing, and enhance both the calm and concentration of students,
and so have benefits without even having to refer to the special soteriological benefit referred to as “liberation.”

An example of a daily analytical meditation used to educate emotions in Tibetan Buddhism is the Four Immeasurables\(^9\), a meditation used to cultivate love, compassion, bliss, and equanimity.\(^{10}\) According to Vajrayana Buddhism, the sublime feelings cultivated by the Four Immeasurables do not arise on the basis of repressing negative emotions and states, but rather through transmuting them. Indeed, Vajrayana Buddhism is founded on the principal that all experience is capable of being transformed into the bliss, compassion and wisdom of enlightenment. So, as in all Buddhist meditation, one is taught to be aware of experience without discrimination; however, Tantric meditations differ from other forms of meditation in placing less emphasis on controlling experiences of greed, hatred and delusion, and more on transforming their energies for the path. Not only to learn from such experiences, which is a general characteristic of all Buddhist paths, but to actually use their energy or momentum in what is called a “purified” form. What “purifies” them is the realization of their emptiness and interdependence. So, for instance, in Highest Yoga Tantric meditations, hatred is transformed into a powerful mind of protective intelligence, while sexual desire becomes the subtle mind and energy needed to transform suffering into enlightened bliss and rapture. Delusion becomes overview, and the vajra pride required to visualize and then manifest oneself as a Buddha.

The education of feelings is connected to the education of ethics. Feelings may not directly produce ethical or unethical actions, but they certainly influence them. Indeed, feeling may be more important than reason in determining ethical action. When well developed, feelings of love and compassion in particular are considered to have the
power to manifest as spontaneous ethical action. Likewise, feelings affect our learning, and most favourably as interest. To be in a state of interest is to be in a state of love, with respect to both oneself and one’s subject, whose differences dissolve in the absorption that comes with such learning. Two of the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, energy and bliss, combine to form “interest” as it arises in everyday circumstances of learning. Just as Joseph Campbell famously pronounced, “Follow your bliss,” so in Buddhism there is the sense that to follow one’s interest is to follow the scent of enlightenment and love.

B. Educating powers of reflection / investigation: Analytical meditation

In the wake of such interest, the desire to investigate quite naturally arises. To investigate requires the posing of questions and analysis, both of which rely on language. To educate students to develop their powers of reflection requires training in reasoning and analysis, which in the Tibetan monastic system is accomplished either through dialectical debate or analytical meditation. Analytical meditation is a term used to refer to the systematic application of reason and logic to analyze a phenomenon with an end either to revealing its nature or to changing it. Analytical meditations are required to develop inferences about phenomena that are not apparent in ordinary experience. Such inferences, when meditated on, can lead to the direct experience of the phenomenon in question. Analytical meditation is an important method for constructing the inference on which the realization of emptiness and interdependence is based. Likewise, as mentioned, analysis is considered to be the most efficacious way to work through negative feelings towards oneself and others. Many consider the debate system one long
analytical meditation on emptiness. Analytical meditations on compassion, however, are
learned through extracurricular studies and practiced through meditation, not in debate.

Meditation is often considered in juxtaposition to “discursive” practices. It is true
that there are single-pointed meditations for which discursive thinking is an obstacle (as a
cause of mental excitation) both to the cultivation of concentration and calm-abiding;
however, in analytical meditation “discursive” practices as the controlled use of thought
and language are essential to the process of meditation. It differs from discursiveness as
distraction in that the object of analysis is held as the central object of meditation, and the
analytical process circles about that object, generally a question, in a sustained and
systematic fashion. It could be described as one suffers the question, where here
suffering means enduring rather than the usual Buddhist sense of dissatisfaction, or
perhaps it could be considered the dissatisfaction of not knowing.

C. Educating awareness / attention: Single-pointed and mindfulness meditation

Once one is sufficiently interested and engaged in investigating a phenomenon, it is
important to be able to sustain attention on the subject to carry it through to a direct
experience of the phenomenon in question. Only when knowledge is translated into
experience in this way is it realized or embodied in one’s experience and manner of
living in the world. There appears to be the assumption in many Western institutional
contexts that powers of attention are somehow fixed by our genetic or familial
backgrounds and are not amenable to being educated. As a consequence, when children
develop pathologies of attention such as Attention Deficit Disorder, we turn to chemical
rather than educational treatments. If instead we considered attention more as a habit,
and, like any habit, amenable to being changed and altered—in short, educated—and if education offered such techniques to educate attention, then this could greatly enhance the ability of many people, especially the attention-challenged, to learn.

1. **Single-pointed meditation:**

   There are forty classical meditations described in the earliest Buddhist texts, which include analytical, single-pointed, and mindfulness meditations. The most direct way to educate concentration or the ability to *sustain* attention on a single object is through single-pointed meditations. These are designed to bring about states of absorption that, when combined with question (analytical investigation), produce the special insight into emptiness that is the cause of liberation. In single-pointed meditations, the particular object of the meditation is secondary to the ability of the consciousness to hold the object with clarity and stability (that is, duration.) So, the point is to learn to apply antidotes to patterns of excitation (that is, desire) that disturb the stability of the mind and patterns of “sinking” (that is, dullness) that disturb the clarity of the mind. Antidotes to excitation include meditations and reflections on suffering and death, and antidotes to sinking include meditations on bliss (such as light, high places, or increasing one’s oxygen intake if necessary). Objects of single-pointed meditation can include: the kasinas (elements); Buddha *rupas* (that is, Buddha bodily forms); breath (at the nostrils); light; and corpses (meditating on decomposing flesh is an antidote to excessive excitation and attachment).

2. **Mindfulness meditation:**

   Although in single-pointed meditation one repeatedly returns to the object of meditation, in mindfulness meditation the object of meditation is not fixed or controlled. Instead, one brings a quality of attention *as such*, or what is called pristine awareness in
Tantra, to whatever happens to arise in one’s experience. So, the point is not to sustain attention on a *stable* but rather on a *changing* object. Mindfulness practice is presented in four branches known as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: mindfulness of body, speech, mind, and phenomena. Thich Nhat Hanh (1998) refers to mindfulness (*smriti*) as:

> *Smriti* literally means “remembering,” not forgetting where we are, what we are doing, and who we are with. Mindfulness always arises in the context of a relationship with ourselves, other people, or things. …Our breathing, walking, movements, feelings, and the phenomena around us are all parts of the “relationship” in which mindfulness arises. With training, every time we breathe in and out, mindfulness will be there, so that our breathing becomes a cause and condition for the arising of mindfulness. (p. 215)

In a text on mindfulness of breathing (*anapanasati*), the Buddha explains how mindfulness of body, speech, mind, and phenomena can arise when the breath is taken as an object of meditation. In this teaching on mindfulness, we see the systematic, some might say scientific, approach to experience in Buddhism. Through interdependence and causality, such mindfulness cultivates the seven factors of enlightenment —mindfulness, investigation, energy, rapture, tranquillity, concentration, and equanimity:

> Whenever a monk dwells in the contemplation of body, feelings, mind, and mind-objects, …unclouded mindfulness becomes established in him. …Dwelling mindful in that manner, he wisely investigates, examines, and scrutinizes the respective object; and while doing so, the enlightenment factor “Investigation of Reality” is initiated in the monk. …While he wisely investigates, …unremitting
energy is initiated in him. ...In him possessed of energy unworldly rapture arises.

...The body and mind of one who is filled with rapture becomes tranquil. ...The mind of one who is tranquil and happy becomes concentrated. ...On the mind thus concentrated he looks with perfect equanimity. (Hanh, 1975, p. 129-134)

D. Educating the bodymind / realization: Tantric meditation

The Tantric meditations of the Vajrayana school of Buddhism\textsuperscript{12} use visualizations to reconstruct a meditator's aggregates and the world in "the pristine awareness of bliss and voidness." The iconography employed in such visualizations function like a language, read and interpreted by the bodymind. Accordingly, such meditations involve more than symbolic (that is, conceptual and metaphoric) texts, but also imaginary (that is, bliss) and real (that is, biochemical) texts, to borrow Lacan's division of experience into the symbolic, imaginary and real.\textsuperscript{13} My own view, based on over twenty years of meditational practice with some of the leading Tantric practitioners and teachers in the world, is that the methods of Vajrayana emerged developmentally out of successive generations of mindfulness practices. With the assistance of the refined awareness such practices cultivate, this lineage of mindfulness practitioners evolved what became a code with which the human body/mind learned to negotiate its own evolution.

I do not know if anyone can say in any decisive or final sense what is actually transpiring when Tantric meditative techniques are applied, but many can testify to their efficacy, and in the end that is what matters. Given the emphasis and skill with which science explains phenomena, scientific investigations may prove effective in shedding greater light on the processes involved in Tantric meditative transformations. If such a
partnership does emerge between science and Buddhism, the results could be quite astounding. In particular, such a partnership promises to produce body/mind technologies based on phenomenologically (that is, experientially) negotiated transformations of biological, if not evolutionary, significance. In this respect, I have come to understand a “Buddha,” a condition to which any human being can aspire, to refer to someone who has realized some aspect of the next stage in human evolution. To use a computer analogy, human beings have the hardware for such an evolution to take place, but they require the proper software (that is, education, meditation, experience and support) to run the program. I realize this is a lofty claim, but it is one I stand behind with confidence, based on inferences and direct experiences arising in meditation retreats and on my encounters with Tibetan lamas. I do not believe that evolutionary biology promises a definitive explanation of Tantric meditative practices and education, but rather just another story to contribute to many layers of richly textured stories.

Tantric meditational practices are difficult to explain in any detail, not so much because of their secrecy as their self-secrecy. They are self-secret insofar as they test the limits of human abilities to represent the liminal experiences that arise in Tantra, which can only be adequately or safely known through careful and systematic cultivation within one’s own continuum of experience. To give a simple example from a Lower Tantric meditation practice, let us consider the meditation on Avalokiteshvara or Chenreisig (in Tibetan), the deity of compassion who is said to be rainbow white in colour. Even just to visualize such a colour—which is a quality of light as much as colour, like sunlight reflecting on freshly fallen snow—can activate an experience of pristine awareness. Please, test this out now and witness this effect yourself. Initially, it
may be difficult to “imagine” colour and light, but such powers of visualization are capable of being learned with sufficient instruction and practice. Generally, we experience a heightened attention, pleasure and bliss on encountering such a scene with our senses, and the same effect can be created through reconstructing such experience in our imagination. The rainbow-white deity Chenreisig has four arms, two of which hold a jewel to his heart while the other left hand holds a lotus blossom and the other right hand holds a rosary. His form bears a resemblance to patterns of organization in the human nervous system—the bifurcation of structures and functions in the brain, for example, and their integration through the corpus callosum. The division of hemispheric functions resembles the implements held in his hands—a crystal rosary for counting mantra in his right hand (analytical speech) and the lotus flower in his left (bliss, spatial awareness), and a dark blue wish-fulfilling mani (mind) jewel in the middle.

As previously mentioned, in Gelugpa nunneries and monasteries, serious Tantric meditational studies are delayed until after one has completed philosophical (that is, sutra) studies, which, to complete a geshe degree, takes an average of 15 to 20 years. The Gelugpa schools separate sutra and Tantric monastic institutions. This reflects a certain tension in this curriculum between rational scholarship and meditative experience. To reiterate, in the eight years since Dolma Ling was established as an educational and later institutional entity, to my knowledge the nuns have not participated in any meditational retreats. This is in marked contrast to the corresponding Nyingma nunnery in Dharamsala, Shungsep Nunnery, where some of the nuns are currently engaged in a three-year retreat in caves in Nepal. Likewise, some monks in the very Gelugpa Sera Monastery, who were graduating with full geshe degrees, said they rarely meditated or
did retreats in spite of holding Tantric initiations. For most, serious Tantric study and practice is postponed until after the completion of philosophical studies.

This reflects the tendency within highly organized, rational systems of knowledge to separate from and marginalize experiential systems of education, especially those directed at educating liminal experiences. The converse may also be true, suggesting a pattern of antagonism between reason and direct experience as they become institutionalized in education. This may or may not reflect underlying cognitive tensions between conceptual and perceptual ways of knowing. In the West, such institutional divisions emerged most significantly in the medieval period when monastic schools, based on transforming (that is, educating) students' experience of nature into the experience of God, became progressively separated and isolated from cathedral schools, which focused more on dialectics and reason. Some of the more notable cathedral schools (for example, Notre Dame) became universities (for example, the University of Paris).\textsuperscript{16} In the case of Tibetan Buddhism, the explanations nuns, monks, and administrators commonly give for this separation and neglect is that Tantric meditations are either too difficult or make one prone to madness.

These criticisms are well-founded. If one accepts my premise that meditation involves phenomenologically (that is, experientially) negotiated biochemical events, then it is understandable they would be both difficult and potentially dangerous. Most if not all experience involves biochemical factors, so to begin to change experience directly through means of the body (that is, the symbolic, imaginary, and real body) is a great art with serious repercussions. If you get the picture wrong, so to speak, ....ouch! This gets at the immense value of rigorous training in language, reason, and logic. While
mindfulness training helps to develop the refined awareness required to experience more subtle and liminal states, and so deepens experience so it can be known, educating analytical abilities and powers of reflection allow one to re/cognize such experience and hence to understand it. Accordingly, the skill and grounding offered by an analytically-trained mind enhance the ability to reflect on whatever experiences arise. When complemented by an understanding of emptiness and a strong compassionate motivation, the prerequisites for Tantric practices, a student meditator is safeguarded from harm in their journey. It is a journey that promises much gain for oneself and others, and for this reason alone warrants the risk.

V. Gendering experience:

The two paths of learning in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist monastic education—the more rationalized, philosophical studies and practices of the sutra path and the more esoteric, experiential, testimonial and meditative path of Tantra—are further distinguished by a tendency to gender their respective languages, texts, practices, and practitioners. The sutra tradition, embodied in the dialectical debate tradition, tends to assume a male subject as debater, reader, and author in its textual representations. Furthermore, this male scholar is assumed to be ordained—that is, a monk. Indeed, the historical exclusion of women from literacy education and from training in the rational language of the scholastic texts and debates greatly masculinized the faculty of reason in general. So, it is perhaps not surprisingly that some of the nuns of Dolma Ling resisted my calling them “women” during an English vocabulary lesson, or that later some argued that women are inferior during a public discussion at the nunnery on the status of Tibetan
women. As ordained (that is, celibate) nuns with shaved heads and robes identical to those of monks, they are both able and inclined to identify more with the monastic and Buddhist culture than with other women.

To debate and engage in rational discourse is a human ability, of course, and not the purview of one gender or group. Indeed, for the nuns, it has become an important symbol of their inclusion in the hitherto male-dominated monastic culture. The Tantric tradition, on the other hand, has tended to be feminized, reflecting an overall tendency in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism to distinguish patterns of reason and experience on gender lines. For example, wisdom, emptiness and clear light (as represented in the *Prajnaparamita* sutra and in later Tantric texts) are referred to as the “Mother,” conveying the sense that such experiences are based on a primordial, “infant” awareness. Furthermore, many key Tantric texts and practices have emerged from women, either actual (that is, living) women *dakinis* (sky-goers) like Machig Labdron who developed the *chod* practice, or female symbolic and imaginary *dakinis* purported to have channeled Tantric texts and practices through male authors. Furthermore, in India many female yoginis from outcaste classes and marginalized racial groups helped articulate and develop the Tantric path of learning.17

The gendering of modes of consciousness in Tantra—for example, rational (conceptual) as male and experiential (perceptual) as female—is related to efforts to *engender* qualities of mind rather than particular social roles or identities. This gendering is not predominantly symbolic (that is, representational), but is also indicative of imaginal (that is, bliss, *infancy*) and real (that is, biochemical) differences. Nonetheless, such differences are not essential, nor are they represented as such in Tantric meditations,
which are based on continuously reflecting on the empty, void (that is, constructed, interdependent, relative) nature of phenomena. Indeed, it is explicitly taught in Tantra (as distinct from the sutra tradition) that women are equal and in some respects advantaged in their ability to realize Buddhahood. So, as we move into the centre of our mandala to consider the question of what it means to realize or embody learning in the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition, I will move away from the question of gender, assuming it is clear that such realization is part of the human path to learning rather than the privilege of any particular culture, gender, or race.

Our understanding of the nature and role of reason, experience, and their relationship in education are a significant determinant of our quality of life. It is interesting to note the tendency for rational analysis to lean towards errors of negation and nihilism, and for experience to lean towards the error of reification. It is only in their conversation, that is, their “moving together” in testimonial dialogue, that these extremes are corrected. The tendency to fall into extremes of either reason (as nihilism) or experience (as reification) results in a polarization that can easily lead to the assertion of one at the expense of the negation or suppression of the other. The key, according to Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, is the middle way, which is possible because of their lack of essential or inherent existence, an insight that leads to the understanding of the interdependent nature of reason and direct experience. Reason arises as an inference about the relations between phenomena directly experienced, as does direct experience arise by reflecting on valid inferences of phenomena not readily apparent in untrained experience. The question of how this relationship plays itself out in the realization of knowledge is the subject of the next chapter.
So, let us leave these rich fields of green to enter yet another gate. This gate leads to the deep blue centre of our mandala, where we can gaze on all it is we have accomplished. With the passing of green, the passing through...the passing through the gate from green comes a deep blue rising. There is...so much...blue...beautiful blue.

Notes:

1. The translation of the five aggregates varied dramatically according to text, author, and tradition. I have chosen to use the terms employed by Thurman (1995) in his endnotes.
2. This is Thich Nhat Hanh’s (1998) phrasing (pp. 3). I have heard this same distillation of the four noble truths into two in other teacher’s oral accounts, where they have translated the phrase as “I teach but two things: suffering and the cessation of suffering.” Regardless of the phrasing, as Hanh points out, this idea was reinforced by the Buddha on numerous occasions during his lengthy life of teaching.
3. This comes from the “Discourse on turning the Wheel of the Dharma,” (Dhamma Cakka Pavattana Sutta) as it appears in Hanh (1998, pp. 259.)
4. This quotation comes to me by way of my friend Anne Cairns, who transcribed it from a poster.
5. One example is medical education, where the ability to understand and communicate experiential and ethical subjects related to death and dying are of immediate professional interests. Yet, Calam and Andrew (2000), who studied physicians’ discomfort with and inability to discuss resuscitation orders (“code status”) with patients who are dying, found that “code status orders and discussions are sparse and erratic.” One physician they interviewed explained: “I think my training was, and perhaps the training for all physicians at the time was such that all our endeavors were to defeat death, prevent death. So, in a way I think we try to avoid it, and maybe because of our own sense of mortality."
6. In Tibetan Buddhism, it is understood that consciousness rests on an unbroken continuum that perseveres across lifetimes, but only the most subtle level of consciousness constitutes such a continuum. So, one cannot be said to be the same “person” in successive lifetimes.
7. Boler’s work has been influenced by the earlier writing and work of Felman and Laub (1992), which considered the role of testimonials in representing liminal experiences of suffering, and in particular of the Holocaust, in educational and therapeutic contexts.
8. On numerous occasions, HH the Dalai Lama has pointed out that analytical meditations are the most effective way to overcome anger and develop compassion, and are more effective than single-pointed meditations in doing so (see the video “Secular Meditations” where he discusses this).
9. Note the use of the term “immeasurables,” which connote the liminal nature of these feelings, and the fact that they test the limits of verbal and representational “measurement.”
10. The Four Immeasurables are recited daily and reflected upon. They are:
    (love): May all beings find happiness and the cause of happiness,
    (compassion): May they be free of suffering and the cause of suffering,
    (bliss): May they be inseparable from sorrowless bliss,
    (equanimity): May they abide in equanimity, free of bias, both greed and hatred.
11 I here quote from the appendices of Hanh’s (1975), but used Namgyal Rinpoche (1992) as a resource as well.

12 Vajrayana Buddhism has been restricted to Tibet and a small Japanese sect, until recently, at any rate, when it has become popularized in North America. In addition, there is a tradition of Hindu tantra, such as that found in Kashmiri Shиваism, may have influenced the development of Vajrayana Buddhism.

13 For a good discussion of the connection between Lacan and Buddhism see Loy (1996).

14 I attended a conference on Tibetan Medicine hosted by George Washington University in Washington DC in the autumn of 1998, where numerous Western medical researchers presented studies on the physical and biochemical effects of various meditational practices. The Harvard MindBody clinic has long been involved in such studies under the direction of Herbert Benson, MD.

15 Although Dolma Ling is purportedly rime or non-sectarian in name, in practice I know of only one of its 120 nuns (during my tenure in 1997/98) who did not identify themselves as Gelugpa. That was a Karma Kagyu nun from Utsang. The curriculum is organized in the model of Gelugpa monastic education, and the texts are the same. The only concession I encountered to make it rime was that rather than chanting the Lama Choepa (Guru Offering), a distinctive Gelugpa Tantric prayer during ritual tsog offerings, the nuns recite Chandrakiri’s sutra text on Madhyamika, which indicates as much a bias against Tantra as an effort to be rime. Accordingly, I qualify my observations of education at Dolma Ling as concerning the Gelugpa monastic education system in particular, understanding that even in this respect Dolma Ling is non-standard insofar as it includes secular studies in its curriculum.

16 In this case, it was the monastic system that acted most vehemently to suppress the cathedral schools, when Bernard of Clairvaux deceived Peter Abelard, the famous dialectician, scholar and teacher of the Cathedral School of Notre Dame, to have him excommunicated (see Kristeva, 1983/1987; or Radice, 1974).

17 For an indication of this, I would suggest reading some of the biographies of the mahasiddhis, such as those found in a text translated by Dowman (1998).

18 Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) is attributed with suggesting that, while women (during his time) were less likely to turn their minds to the thought of enlightenment, once they did so, the path to Buddhahood was in fact easier for them because of their greater store of good merit (Dowman, 1984).

19 Thanks to Cyndy Roomy (Feb. 2000, personal communication) for this insight, which she articulated at a student-run Buddhist teaching and discussion group at Zuru Ling in Vancouver.
BLUE: ...realization

Chapter five...
...a spacious blue

For as long as space endures.
For as long as sentient beings remain,
Until then may I too abide,
To dispel the misery of the world.

- Santideva, India 8th Century

Freedom...the word appears, imbibes a pooling indigo stain, then disappears into ink again. Deep blue solace. In the heart of the body a life pulses deep blue bloodlines, climbing through wrists into hands. Our fingers write these lines into deep blue words spreading over pristine white pages. We step back to interpret their pattern—the contours of a face, a butterfly’s wing. They spell freedom and we turn away. Can’t be. The primordial deep blue-black we once thought silent, speaks, while what was once divinity leaves a gap, a space, an unfathomable, vast, endless, infinite space of blue-black—our refuge. Unnamed, we lean towards its anonymity as into a lover’s arms.

"...By interrogating that part of subjects that is left out by master signifiers, it becomes possible to reclaim what has been repressed and thereby institute a new economy of the collective psychological and hence also the social structure.

If one wants to be subversive, Lacan suggests, one would be advised to approach ‘the hole from which the master signifier gushes’.”

Bracher (1993)
blue is a river...

blue is a river,
white-capped and alone,
a desolate home we walked on
in winter while ice, breaking like bones,
collapsed around us.

we were four—children—I recall,
lining churchill avenue one sunday
in search of adventure, thumbs to the sky,
we hitched a ride to dare
either us / or the ice / to crack.

[in my eight-year-old mind,]
frigid ice tore open, swallowed us
& we drowned, struggling as its gaping,
bottomless wound oozed blue]
but I never admitted I was scared.

I never believed the ice...
...was sure it would slip & drift, dip
& slide our fragile forms—skin/flesh/bones—
into troubled waters memory & reason
assured me still lurked underneath.

So I left them, all three--my sister,
a toddler, my brothers, seven and ten—
left them to tease the river blue
while I ran between the shoreline
& home—in panic & alone...

mother appeared in the car & stopped
& together we combed the crests of frozen sands,
the horizon, bleak without a hint
to suggest they were alive, when,
around a corner, like a mirage...

...three children walking on water.
World Peac Ceremony at the Tibetan Children's Village, (TC Dharamsala)

TCV Students
If I were to advance any thesis whatsoever, that in itself would be a fault: but I advance no thesis and so cannot be faulted.

Nagarjuna, from *Vigrahavyanvarāṇi*, verse 29

...The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy.

...The cognitive utopia would be to use concepts to unseal the non-conceptual with concepts, without making it their equal.

Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 5-10

For Adorno, the ‘end of philosophy,’ which must come with the full acknowledgement of the horror of the Holocaust, left him only with ‘negative dialectics.’ For Adorno, the violence of the idealist attempt to find ‘truth’ in theory can only be exposed by demonstrating its ‘nontruth.’ To pretend that in this fallen world we could give an affirmative account of the conditions of truth or of justice would only further perpetuate the violence of idealism.

Drucilla Cornell, *The philosophy of the limits*, p. 181

1. **The conceptual/perceptual divide:**

In the difference between the rational and the experiential, there is an underlying tension between an idea(l)ized world of conceptual construction and a realized world of suffering and desire. The challenge of integrating these two ways of knowing such that rational activities better serve the elimination of suffering and realization of happiness is the continuing challenge of human beings and their institutions. Sakyamuni Buddha taught that to approach the world from either extreme, asceticism (for example, rational idealism, discipline) or an insatiable sensuality (for example, desire, experience), leads to suffering. There is in either extreme the tendency to overly-identify with the mind or body, respectively. So, he developed an educational path designed to reduce and
eliminate these extremes and their associated suffering, to integrate the human body-mind experience, a path of learning that has come to be known as “the Middle Way.”

Paz (1969/1982) describes Tantric Buddhism in particular as a case of a pattern of conjunction between the cultural extremes of what can be represented around the signs body and non-body. He contrasts this with Western civilization, whose history vacillated between one or the other extreme in a pattern of disjunctions. Modern Western culture has been shaped by vacillations between these extremes—between a secularizing culture based on unbridled consumption and a Protestant ascetic culture based on the work ethic. In his classic critique of capitalism and Protestantism, Erich Fromm (1941) described the complicity between Protestant asceticism and capitalist development:

Those very qualities which were rooted in this [modern] character structure—compulsion to work, passion for thrift, the readiness to make one’s life a tool for the purposes of an extra personal power, asceticism, and a compulsive sense of duty—were character traits which became productive forces in capitalistic society and without which modern economic and social development were unthinkable.

(p. 102)

It may seem paradoxical that an ascetic culture should underlie a materialist culture of consumption, unless one considers that both may be driven by the same cause—the repression of experience. With asceticism, this is apparent insofar as it is explicitly based on rejecting the experience of certain bodily sensations, desires and pleasures. In conspicuous consumption, on the other hand, it is more difficult to recognize its asceticism because, quite to the contrary, consumption appears to be based on an unbridled sensuality and desire for new experience. Yet, the excesses in
consumption found in modern societies is predicated on the perpetuation of a state of dissatisfaction in which people consume goods and services not just for their pleasure or functional value, but as ideas or concepts, that is as signs of prosperity, wellbeing, and ego-identity. In this respect, much of what we buy is not really “consumed” at all; indeed, to fully experience wellbeing and satisfaction through the objects and services we consume would undermine the very greed that drives consumer culture. So, it is not surprising that television, capitalism, and consumer culture have become so reciprocally and deeply intertwined, where television programming and commercials produce the type of pseudo-experience that feeds a state of perpetual dissatisfaction or lack, to use Lacan’s term. They continuously suggest liminal experiences of suffering, death (violence) and bliss (sex), without the capacity to turn a suggestion into an embodied realization, that is possible only with a direct, lived experience. Also, in shortening audience attention spans, television makes it more difficult for people to sustain attention on experience or on the analysis required to critique and resist the appearances that drive and manipulate people to consume.

For these and no doubt other reasons, Buddhism has and continues to have great appeal as a way to enhance the quality of life and freedom of those living within modern environments. It offers a learnable way to extend attention and thereby deepen both experience and powers of attention. Furthermore, its path is directed at learning to extend both conceptual and perceptual experience, in turn, to become fully realized in the praxis or activities of living. It does so by a method combining a “middle way” view (dialectic), an ethic of moderation, and a path to integrate analysis and direct experience (meditative praxis). At the root of the middle way view or dialectic is the notion that what generates
extremist tendencies is the ignorance that causes sentient beings to disregard certain experiences in their struggles to adapt and survive. This neglect, in turn, leads to patterns of volitional tendencies (that is, desires and aversions) that give rise to a cycle of interdependently related experiences (dependent-origination) that culminate in suffering. The antidote to such ignorance, and hence to suffering itself, is insight into emptiness (the lack of inherent or essential existence) and interdependence.

I have chosen to emphasize the difference between conceptual and perceptual experience and knowledge because I feel it is important for pedagogical reasons to do so. While the subject of such differences has been championed by many great Western thinkers, including Francis Bacon, Kant, and most notably in education, Dewey (1916/1944, 1929), there has been a tendency in the 20th century to dismiss such differences. This dismissal has come jointly from philosophical and scientific investigations (for example, deCharms, 1998) that have concluded that concepts and perceptions are impossible to definitively untangle. Yet, these analytical reflections neglect the fact that from the perspective of unanalyzed experience, there is a decisive difference between the experience of concepts and direct perception. Buddhism asserts two truths or ways to approach any phenomenon—the way they appear in experience and the way they are found to exist on analysis—what are referred to as "conventional" and "ultimate" truths, respectively. In Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, the differences between concepts and direct perceptions are conserved for their pedagogical value; however, eventually such differences are dismantled with the understanding that all phenomena arise on the basis of being designated or labeled by a consciousness. In this view, both concepts and ordinary perception are conventional truths, while their emptiness of

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inherent existence is an ultimate truth. That it is an "ultimate" truth does not mean it is superior or more true; these two truths, conventional and ultimate, co-inhere as equals, united as interdependence and emptiness in the realization of freedom.

II. Freedom in debate:

In the nuns’ debate on debate (Chapter 3), it took an unfamiliar form of debate, a Western debate format, to so effectively critique their own system. I have found similar blocks to self-reflection and self-critique within Western disciplines. Rational systems seem to be constrained in their ability to effectively engage in self-reflection and self-criticism insofar as they are employing the language and logic of the system under examination. It is interesting to note that while the nuns reflected critically on their own debate system in a Western-style debate, they simultaneously recognized the shortcomings of the Western system (for example, its tendencies to polarize and discourage moderation). This reflective insight was possible because of their familiarity with a viable alternative—that is, Tibetan dialectical debate. Such a reflexive awareness is a great asset to developing the skill, will, and creativity (that is, freedom) to negotiate the rapid changes that accompany modernization and globalization. In this respect, curricula that integrate different cultural traditions or alternatively different experiential/rational modes of reflection in one curriculum offer a path to enhancing critical reflection, reflexivity, creativity, and freedom. Conversely, when education is based on learning a singular rational system, such reflexive\textsuperscript{2} awareness is unlikely to develop.

Reason and the rationalized systems human beings generate from this ability involves a process of negation whereby we are able to see beyond immediate appearances to generate inferences about, and imagine possibilities for, the world. The difficulty is
that this process of negation may become disconnected from direct experience. In negating (critiquing) experience and the world and imagining idealized worlds, it becomes possible to disregard the world as it is. Furthermore, these rational systems become self-perpetuating because they don’t just describe an objective world “out there,” they generate that world. As Maturana (1990, 1997a, 1997b, 1998) and Maturana and Varela (1987) suggest, in accord with the Buddhist view, the world we experience is inextricable from our biological and cultural conditioning. Forms or bodies, feelings, perception, concepts and consciousness co-inhere to create our experience of the world. Personal and collective problems may be generated in part by the organization of our knowledge, so to then ask those same systems to help us address those problems may be self-defeating. For the nuns, the Buddhist philosophical debate system contributed to the loss of their cultural independence, but so too did it dissuade them from addressing that loss within their education. That tended to be dealt with in non-traditional formats.

In their curriculum, the nuns move in the creative space between two cultures—the global modern and the traditional Buddhist. This introduces the idea of cultural “hybridity” described by Bhabha (1994), a creative and non-hierarchical encounter between two cultures in a moment of “being beyond,” an “intervening space.” “This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (p. 4). This third space is a creative space and one that offers freedom from some of the constraints faced by students negotiating a singular rational system or order of knowledge. This is a space that emerges in intercultural and interdisciplinary conversations.
The nuns' debating experiences suggest that culturally-determined language games circumscribe the subjects capable of being discussed within the particular format of the game. The unique quality of Dolma Ling's curriculum that facilitated such reflexivity, which seemed to be lacking in the larger monastic institutions, is the integration of a traditional Buddhist monastic curriculum with modernized (that is, Western modeled) Tibetan secular courses, all within a single program. In the end, freedom in debate means much more than a particular content; debate as a form of communication and interaction is a singular way human beings work out freedom of thought, speech, choice and experience. With such freedom, we can better choose what experiences are best conserved and what are best disregarded. In the West, the tendency to polarize positions into for and against has encouraged strong emotional responses of attachment and aversion projected onto both subjects and speakers in public debate. The effects can be witnessed in the public arenas of politics and journalism, where partisanship, personal innuendo, sensationalism and scandal have replaced civil, respectful, rational dialogue on issues pertaining to our collective welfare. In this respect, understanding other models of dialogue and dialectics can help inform our own (apparently deteriorating) modes of public discourse.

Language arises as the fossilized remains of a past experience imposing itself like a template on a more complex present. In this respect, we conserve order by simplifying, in some cases ignoring, experience with language. Yet, at the very moment we move our lips to utter a word, we bend language to represent more accurately the altered conditions we are experiencing. Both qualities of language, its conservative and creative characteristics, contribute to creating hospitable environments for the enhancement of
human life. Humans, after all, live as much or more in cultural and linguaged environments as in physical and perceptual ones; indeed, our experiences of the physical and perceptual domains are constructed together in language and culture. Rational language games are one important instance in which language is applied to conserve a past order within a shifting present. These games conserve personal and collective paths of preferences and choices in the forms of methods of evaluation, forms of interaction, and contents of attention. When people participate in such language games, they develop more consensually co-ordinated intentions and actions. We see this in many spheres of life, as, for instance, when people meet and use democratic principles to arrive at a decision that affects their mutual well-being.

In the modern experience, both freedom and creativity have been organized and depicted in a dialectical process that transpire within a linear conception of time. The process was predicated on the polarization and reification of a succession of past antithetical positions, which negated one another in a present promising future freedom and creative synthesis. This future-directed dialectic was based on poiesis (production) rather than on a present-directed, reflexive praxis (action). Such an emphasis on creativity as production rather than action reflects an underlying ethical weakness. As Aristotle described in *Nicomachean Ethics*: “production aims at an end other than itself; but this is impossible in the case of action, because the end is merely to do what is right” (Agamben, 1993, p. 140). Adorno (1966) described the “negative” nature of dialectics, its entrapment in conceptual and abstract loops, a via negativa with respect to concepts and hence conditioned thinking that, while promising freedom, seems to lead only to the desire for yet another word. Nonetheless, it is conditioning itself, conserved in language
and concepts, that bind the chains against which freedom repels, and so there is the need to use concepts to deconstruct themselves if we are to open a space for the experience of freedom and bliss:

Although dialectics allows us to think the absolute, the absolute as transmitted by dialectics remains in bondage to conditioned thinking. ...The need in thinking is what makes us think. It asks to be negated by thinking; it must disappear in thought if it is to be really satisfied; and in this negation it survives.

(p. 405-408)

If we are to conserve the dialectic of freedom, it needs to be based on a new conception of time, one that is no longer future directed or historically determined, but the “dialectic at a standstill” proposed by Benjamin, as Agamben (1993) argues:

For the time has come to end the identification of history with a conception of time as a continuous linear process, and to understand thereby that the dialectic is quite capable of being a historical category without, as a consequence, having to fall into linear time. It is not the dialectic which has to be adequate to a pre-existing, vulgar conception of time; on the contrary, it is this conception of time which must be adequate to a dialectic that is truly freed from all ‘abstractness.’

(p. 122)

Buddhism has developed an accessible, replicable path based on a dialectic freed from ‘abstractness’—a dialectic of freedom. That dialectic is not the dialectic of debate per se, which is abstract insofar as it is a conceptual via negative designed to deconstruct tendencies to reify concepts and identities, but the dialectic between analytical reasoning and direct experience that is its fully articulated meditative path. We see this dialectic
mirrored in the Gelugpa monastic education system in the separation and relationship
between the institutions and studies of sutra and Tantra. Liberation comes through a
subtle analytically-trained mind as it enters and experiences the pristine awareness
cultivated in Tantric meditations. Although the Gelugpa sect is more analytically focused
than the other lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, and the monastic curriculum is more
analytical as a rule than lay education, this creative conversation between analysis and
direct experience is a feature of Tibetan Buddhist, and indeed all Buddhist, education.

"Freedom" and "liberation" are terms describing the removal of obstacles to the
movement—either real or metaphoric movement (that is, development)—of sentient
beings. The particular forms of suffering, epistemologies, and worldviews propagated by
a culture and people dramatically alter the way it views and understands freedom. The
Enlightenment has propagated a particular view of freedom as independence, "as man’s
freedom from self-incurred immaturity" as Kant professed. In the Tibetan language, this
type of freedom is represented by two terms—self-powered (Rang dbang) and self-
grasping or self-determined (Rang dzin). The last term is used to describe the type of
freedom Tibetans are trying to negotiate for their nation.

What is interesting is that both of these types of freedom are explicitly refuted in
the ultimate understanding of freedom in Tibetan Buddhism (that is, rNam par) or what is
translated as "liberation." As a nun at Dolma Ling explained to me, the concept of
freedom as independence (that is, Rang dbang), though important to the wellbeing of
people, is considered a more conventional understanding of freedom based on a narrow
interpretation of suffering as pain. The Buddhist notion of liberation, on the other hand,
is based on a more subtle (analytical) and complex understanding of suffering as
pervasive to experience, suffering which is rooted in the very belief in a self-powered, independent, and inherent nature to phenomena. So, liberation in the Buddhist path, accomplished through the realization of emptiness and interdependence, appears to be the opposite of the Enlightenment understanding of freedom as independence. Yet, the two forms of freedom are more complementary than they appear to be, and can be considered two sides of the same phenomenon—that is, conventional and ultimate meanings of freedom. Indeed, they may depend on one another to become fully realized. So, a dialogue between these two paths to freedom offers great potential to enhancing the quality of life and well-being on this planet.

In this respect, it is not surprising to discover aspects of such a dialogue already taking place within Western thought itself, between modernist (that is, critical) and postmodern (that is, deconstruction) schools of philosophy. The difficulty is that, true to the Western debate tradition, there is little dialogue or “conversation” (that is, moving together) taking place. The two schools have tended to polarize their respective views of freedom and the path to freedom, and hence have oriented more on critiquing one another than in finding a path through the middle that might integrate (that is, make whole) their respective positions. In this respect, the Buddhist concept of two truths may prove helpful, and in particular the idea that an analysed or ultimate truth need not negate a conventional truth as it appears in ordinary experience or perception.³

Indeed, the Buddhist pre-modern view bears marked resemblances to aspects of post-modernism.⁴ The principal differences concern the value placed on direct experience and compassion. As Loy (1992) argues, deconstruction is finally an abstract activity involving language, concepts and analysis, while Buddhism, on the other hand,
carries deconstruction through to direct perceptual experience itself. In doing so, the Buddhist path offers insight into the liminal, infant experience that is the basis of freedom; this is possible by virtue of its sophisticated meditational practices. In the Buddhist via negativa path, what is removed is more than just philosophical errors but innate errors reifying phenomena. In deconstruction, the focus tends to be on philosophical errors alone. So, what is realized in Buddhism—a radically transformed experience and motivation (that is, compassion)—is limited in deconstruction to the philosophical view alone and is unlikely to extend to experience and such a motivation. Perhaps deconstruction needs to spend more time deconstructing itself.  

III. Realization:

If the realization of emptiness and/as interdependence are the cause of liberation, then it is important to understand what it means to “realize” knowledge. In the most conventional sense of the term, we find the idea of conscious recognition—as in, “I realize my error.” We do not learn as “realization” from concepts or experiences in isolation, but through a hybrid interaction between the two, in a dialectical relationship between what is inferred and what is directly experienced. If I stop exercising and begin to feel tired and get headaches, I only “realize” what it is I am learning from this experience when I make the inference that it is related to my stopping exercising. It is this realization that leads me to change my actions and start to exercise again. Clearly some degree of awareness (that is, of being tired and suffering) and analysis are involved.

In translations of Buddhist texts, the terms “perception,” “experience,” and “realization” are used interchangeably, especially when prefaced with the modifier

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“direct.” So, the direct realization of emptiness is treated as synonymous with the direct experience of emptiness. The distinction between experience and realization are not explicitly drawn because this direct experience automatically or spontaneously leads to its enactment or “realization.” I, on the other hand, distinguish experience and realization because of the potential benefits derived from consciously attempting to bring experiential insights into ethical action. This will help to reinforce a movement spreading throughout the Buddhist world, “socially-engaged Buddhism.” This movement is one Buddhist response to the encounter with modernity. Socially-engaged Buddhism may be found in different guises throughout Asian and Western Buddhism, and is directed at adapting Buddhism to address the most pressing social issues facing modern societies.6

Attending to the term realization more deeply, we find the idea that something is somehow “made real,” or, according to a dictionary7 definition, something is enacted or actualized. In enactment we have the idea of action, and that brings us to praxis. The “x” in this term is the key that links it to the idea of “reflexion,” that is to a form of practice that is self-aware. Now, in action we have the further suggestion of a gesture. What is a gesture? Agamben (1993) refers to a cinematic definition by Varro who “inscribes gesture in the sphere of action but distinguishes it clearly from acting [agere] and doing [facere]”. His quote from Varro is worth reproducing here as it makes a key distinction needed to appreciate the idea of realization and its relevance to learning:

A person can make [facere] something and not enact [agere] it, as a poet makes a play, but does not act it (agere in the sense of playing a part); on the other hand the actor acts the play, but does not make it. So the play is made [fit] by the poet, but not acted [agitur] by him; it is acted by the actor, but not made by him.
Whereas the *imperator* (the magistrate in whom supreme power is invested) of whom the expression *res gerere* is used (to carry something out, in the sense of taking it upon oneself, assuming total responsibility for it), neither makes nor acts, but takes charge, in other words carries the burden of it [*sustinet*]. (p. 139-140)

This definition of gesture approaches closely the notion of realization, which also involves taking responsibility and carrying “the burden of it.” According to Agamben (1993), gesture is characterized by “neither production nor enactment, but undertaking and supporting. In other words, gesture opens the sphere of *ethos* as the most fitting sphere of the human” (p. 140). How is an action “undertaken and supported” or, to use Agamben’s phrase, “in what way does a simple fact become an event?” As Agamben suggests, the key to developing the will to take the responsibility to carry knowledge into action is *ethos* or ethics. In Tibetan Buddhism, the principal ethic of concern in such a realization of knowledge is compassion. Furthermore, realization is not quite as controlled and intentional as suggested by a magistrate, but is the fruit of systematic and continuous reflections on, and aspirations to cultivate, compassion. So, like gestures, which tend to be reflexive and semi-conscious actions, in the end, the realization of knowledge becomes spontaneous and arises as the fruit of a sustained reflection on a particular intention. Accordingly, in the spontaneous gestures and actions that arise with the realization of knowledge, there is no creator (script) and actor, just an integrated (that is, from Latin *integer* meaning *whole*) and supported undertaking.

...there is no Creator (pre-determined script) and Actor, just an integrated....

interdependent undertaking...
In the Sautantrika view, conventional and ultimate truths are defined and distinguished differently than in the Madhyamika-Prasangika view on which Tibetan Buddhism is based. In the Sautantrika, a conventional truth is a conceptual truth and direct perception is an ultimate truth (see Klein, 1991). In Madhyamika-Prasangika, on the other hand, a conventional truth is the way things can be said to exist (that is, interdependently), as they appear in ordinary experience, while an ultimate truth is their lack of inherent existence.

It is worth pointing out that the terms reflective and reflexive have different meanings. Reflection involves taking on an other object of analysis, just as a mirror reflects an object but is itself transparent. Conversely, reflexion arises when what is seeing is in turn seen, in this case it concerns the ability of the rational system to see itself, through students of course. In this respect, it concerns a meta-awareness about language, reason and the process of learning on the part of students.

According to Tsongkhapa, a conventional truth can be said to be valid, based on the Prasangika view, so long as it is understood to arise in dependence upon: 1) designation by an agreed-upon convention (that is, a name), 2) that name relate to its demonstrable bases, and 3) where those bases and name are understood to lack inherent existence.

David Hall (1989) argues the same about premodern China in an article entitled, “Modern China and the Post-modern West,” that is that aspects of China’s premodern culture resemble aspects of post-modernity.

In Tibetan Buddhism, one of the definitive arguments that reconcile the two truths is the “emptiness is also empty,” thereby explicating the logic whereby emptiness can be identical with interdependent arising. This is a key step for the connection between wisdom and compassion in that system as well. Indeed, compassion may be the clue. Compassion is what enables people to look beyond their particular view of the world to see that it is greater than our representations of it, and so overcome the polarizations that prove such an obstacle to effective dialogue. As bell hooks once remarked, “I’m appalled at how people so desperately want to choose either/or, rather than to have compassion in a larger, more complex way” (Neilsen, January 2000).

Some examples are: in Burma (Aung San, 1991); in Thailand or Siam (Sivaraksia, 1976, 1992, 1993, 1994); in Viet Nam (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1975); and in North America (Kotler, [Ed.], 1996). There are many others throughout Buddhist countries and communities. For Tibetans, socially-engagement has been focused for the most part on: 1) political action for self-determination, 2) education, and 3) secularizing Buddhist views and practices of compassion to make them more accessible to non-religious or non-Buddhist people. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has been a leading figure in all three expressions of socially-engaged Buddhism (see Gyatso, 1995a, 1990/1992, 1995b, 1985/1995, respectively). To support his educational and secular-social initiatives, HH the Dalai Lama set up the Institute of Universal Responsibility in Delhi with some of the Nobel Peace Prize monies. Another important Tibetan figure in the Tibetan movement for a more socially-engaged Buddhism is the Ven. Samdong Rinpoche (for example, 1996/1997), who is a monk, has served as Chairman of the Assembly of Tibetan People’s Deputies in Dharamsala, as Director of the Tibetan-Sanskrit University in Sarnath, and most recently as head of a Mahatma Gandhi-inspired non-violent resistance movement among Tibetan refugees.

The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language.
POST-SCRIPT: ...on completing a journey
Post-script on completing a journey:

Similarly, this text is not a script to be played out by actors—professionals or even researchers. It is instead, an integrated, supported, and interdependent undertaking and an ongoing performative enactment. The Buddhist path of learning does not end in a fact or in an experience, but in a gesture or an event—a *praxis*. Facts are, after all, unfit for human habitation, and experiences can be lonely. *Events*, on the other hand, are necessarily and unavoidably co-inhabited. What is an event in learning? It involves an interrelation between sentient beings—not necessarily human beings, but sentient beings—and a transformation. The Buddhist path of learning is one that moves from an intention to a path, from a path to a fact, from a fact to a direct experience, from a direct experience to realization...and from realization, back to intention again...that is, compassion. In this way, the path itself is interdependently realized, and, as taught in Mahayana Buddhism, is characterized by compassion in the beginning, middle, and end.

A. The path of learning:

This path of learning is applicable across contents and contexts, and involves a sequence of five interdependent stages that correspond with the five chapters of this text:

1. intention
2. path
3. inference
4. experience
5. realization (of intention)
B. **Pedagogical implications:**

These five stages are common to any Buddhist path. In the Tibetan Gelugpa tradition, the five stages are educated through particular pedagogical methods, which offer practical ways to engage these stages, even in secular contexts.

1. **aspiration, ritual:**

Initially, at the advent of the journey, it is helpful to engage in reflections and rituals of aspiration. This is true later during the process of the journey as well, where periods of reflection and rituals can be incorporated into the beginning of a day or session.

2. **explicit, examined, and apprenticed processes:**

The processes and rationale of the method of learning and validation, the respective roles and interactions, the desired outcomes, and ethics are all explicitly studied and discussed. Furthermore, an expert teacher or peer tutor apprentices students into the method or path.

3. **dialogue, analytical meditation:**

Extensive dialogue between peers and between students and teachers makes the emergence of a community of supported learning possible. All patterns of language, logic and thought are conveyed through social interactions that require a social context and dialogue to develop. When such interpersonal processes of dialogue are ritualized in pedagogical practices, with time their language, logic, and patterns of analyses become internalized to form an *intrapersonal* dialogic or dialectic that enables students to engage in subtle analytical meditations without the support of institutions, teachers, or peers. It is on the basis of such an analytical mind that inferences about phenomena are derived.
4. **mindfulness, single-pointed, or Tantric meditation:**

Meditation is a highly effective way to develop a reflexive awareness capable of recognizing more subtle experiences and phenomena, and of distinguishing the creative, interdependent nature of all experience. Mindfulness meditation is any practice of awareness, but tends to refer to non-discriminating awareness in particular (that is, not fixing on one object of meditation, but just accepting whatever arises). Single-pointed meditations are specific mindfulness practices in which one focuses on a stable object in order to cultivate attention. Tantric meditations incorporate all the five aspects of the path of learning and their pedagogical methods described here; nonetheless, in the Gelugpa monastic curriculum, Tantric meditational training is preceded by the analytical (i.e. sutra) training of philosophical dialectics.1

5. **the event—bodhicitta, mahamudra, and interdependence:**

Experience becomes realized—that is, embodied in an action, gesture (as in a gesture of kindness), or event—rather than enacted or performed as an actor might a script, primarily on the basis of a student’s original intention on undertaking the learning. Such is the power of bodhicitta or what is referred to as “Buddha nature” or the “enlightenment thought,” which is not something Buddhist but natural and innate. There are three types of bodhicitta—aspirational, practical, and actual. These correspond with: 1) the intention to enlighten to assist all sentient beings, 2) efforts to put this intention into practice, and 3) the spontaneous realization of this wish. Actual bodhicitta arises with mahamudra, a Sanskrit term meaning “great gesture” or “great activity,” which, like bodhicitta is both means and end. As means it is a non-discriminating mindfulness practice. The effect of this practice is “self-liberation,” which refers to the fact that with
sufficient awareness, the body-mind liberates itself without the intervention of special meditative “techniques” or guidance. In particular, the motive (that is, force) behind this realization of knowledge is found in compassion, a singular intention. Compassion inspires the movement of wisdom, that is, the insight of interdependence, into action.

In this close connection between intention and realization, the Buddhist path of learning demonstrates a non-linear organization that is well-represented by the mandala, the image with which I structured this text. The mandala differs from the endless circularity of suffering, cyclic existence, a state based on ignorance and the failure to learn or at least to learn wisdom. The Mahayana Buddhist path of learning holds a privileged role for educational contents dealing with compassion and liberation from ignorance. When ignorance is removed, and most specifically the ignorance that either reifies or refutes the existence of phenomena, one leaves cyclic existence but not existence per se. Instead, one comes to inhabit a mandala, that is, a divine abode, where creativity and compassion manifest free of obstacles.

So, I return to the question of creativity, where I began this journey. It is at the centre of this project and mandala. My intention, if realized, will arise in my fruits, which are the complex interconnections between this text, my life experience, and events and activities that arise from these. As I have articulated here, to be ethical, learning should end in an event, not in a factual text or idea. Only in the realization of “an event” or “gesture” do learning and ethics intersect, and only then is the path of learning fully realized. Only with such an end can it be rightly called an ethical endeavour. Otherwise, if there is a choice between learning and ethics in education, as HH the Dalai Lama (1999) argues, ethics is the more important of the two to our collective wellbeing:
We must show children that their actions have a universal dimension. And we must somehow find a way to build on their natural feelings of empathy so that they come to have a sense of responsibility toward others. For it is this which stirs us into action. Indeed, if we had to choose between learning and virtue, the latter is definitely more valuable. The good heart which is the fruit of virtue is by itself a great benefit to humanity. Mere knowledge is not. (p. 181-182)

Our curricula, classroom tasks, and evaluations have been organized, up to and including doctoral dissertations, to orient on “mere knowledge” as information, theories, inferences, and facts. An indication of this is the differential value accorded research and writing (for example, a dissertation), rather than the performance of knowledge implicit in teaching or social action. If we are to make education more ethical and accountable to a process of realization, then it is important to open new avenues for understanding how knowledge is both represented and made manifest (that is, “performed” or realized). I have attempted to creatively engage the standard academic text with alternative forms of discourse to convey experiences not readily represented by its highly impersonal, technical, and specified rational language. At the same time, I have attempted to conserve its tradition of a self-conscious method. I have taken such liberties because, as Kilbourn (2000) expresses it in his article on new trends in theses and academic prose: “Linear prose is limited for capturing the immediacy of experience and the fused, aesthetic quality of a situation” (p. 29). He argues that so long as innovative academic texts conserve some aspect of self-consciousness (that is, explicit intention), then poetic and narrative forms of discourse have the power to convey some of the experiences and voices, even humanity, marginalized and silenced by traditional rational discourses.
In interrupting the linearity of this text and of its time, I have tried to convey, not just an educational tradition, but the experience of such a tradition and its potential relationship to modern, global experience. I have also attempted to open a space for the reader in which some intuition of liminal experience might arise, and hence of the challenges of representing and educating such experience. In this respect, I have tried to compose a reflexive text that shows, not only tells, my meaning, while at the same time, attempting to make it accessible and comprehensible. Now we have reached the end of the journey, and find ourselves in the mandala’s centre, in a creative deep blue, deep inside blue, gazing outwards. Beyond the edges of the mandala lies a vast ocean of phenomena, some of which remains unknown and unnamed, some coming close to recognition. Yet, with courage we can walk on those waters with the knowledge that every step we make is supported and undertaken by the entire ocean, even if we can’t see all that transpires outside the parameters of our view.

For human beings, water constitutes something of the liminal made manifest. Our origin, body, atmosphere, and sustenance, it nonetheless looms so alien and removed from our terrestrial lives. In the encounter with liminal waters, we learn to recognize and move beyond our fears and preconceptions about the world, to edge ever closer towards undiscovered wonders. The world is always greater than we imagine or conceive it to be—thank goodness—for then there is no end to learning.

Notes:

1 While I haven’t dealt with the lay Gelugpa education program as much as with the monastic, it follows a similar pattern, except that the rational, analytical sutra studies that precede Tantric initiations and studies tend to be from Atisha’s Lamrim or “Lamp for the Path of Enlightenment” teachings. This is the pattern of practice found in most North American Buddhist studies as well, where dialectical philosophy and debate tend to be limited to select university programs and Lamrim to less institutionalized, lay programs.
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