

AWAKENING THE MIND

SECOND EDITION, v2

About Juniper

Juniper is an extension of a long Indo-Tibetan Buddhist lineage, illuminating its wisdom and practices in modern culture. We offer a path that unfolds a spiritual dimension to our lives, infusing us with serenity, insight, and compassion and unlocking our potential to become a strong, positive force in the world.

Web Site

www.juniperpath.org

Copyright

© 2010, 2023 Juniper Foundation

Contents

Awakening	1
A Language of Transformation	3
Lineage	6
Building Blocks	10
Spiritual Maturity	18
Starting Where We Are	20

Awakening

The premise of Buddhist ideas is that, because the quality of experience is determined by the mind, by training the mind we can change the quality of experience.

Buddha means “awakened.” It describes what it means to turn inward, to understand the potential of our minds, and to unleash that potential. The Buddhist journey, therefore, is an inner one. Its goals are to take us beyond inner limits, to infuse our endeavors with serenity, inner freedom and joy, and to guide us toward becoming a force of insight and compassion in the world.

The premise of Buddhist thought is that, because the quality of experience is determined by the mind, by training the mind we can change the quality of experience. Whether we are rich or poor, healthy or sick, young or old, it is our inner perspective, reactions, and patterns of behavior that have the greatest effect on experience. Even more importantly, these inner attributes can be changed. The mind is seen not as a rigid and hardwired organ over which we have no control but as a dynamic and flexible system with great potential for growth. This potential of the mind, intuited by Buddhist adepts centuries ago, is now being confirmed by modern psychologists and neuroscientists, who are discovering the effect of thoughts and attitude on experience, and the malleability of the mind even well into adult life.

One of the hallmarks of the Buddhist path is creating a link with a lineage of teachers who transmit the tradition from generation to generation. From this link, we gain the energy and methods to propel our inner growth. The methods described here are from a teaching tradition dating back over two thousand years. From early India, where this tradition originated with a prince

who became known as the Buddha, to the great Indian university of Nalanda to the monastic orders of Tibet, we stand on the shoulders of giants. Juniper is an extension of this lineage, illuminating its insight and practices in modern culture. We are not inventors of something new but are stewards breathing life into a rich tradition in our own culture and time.

Although Buddhist methods date back over two thousand years, their use of inquiry to challenge rigid thinking keeps them current and in tune with modern science and discovery. Therefore, our journey will take us from the caves of ancient yogis to the hallways of modern universities. We will see how the path of a modern yogi encompasses traditional methods of inner development while embracing the findings of physics, biology, psychology and other fields. Along the way we will have the chance to deepen our understanding of our own minds and to expand our awareness of the nature of the self and reality. It is a journey that can be as rich and deep as we wish to make it.

As we will see, the Buddhist path is not a rigid and sequential process; rather, it is akin to learning a language. As we become familiar with its different elements, we gain increasing proficiency. In this work we will introduce the building blocks of this language: Meditation, Balancing Emotions, Cultivating Compassion, and Developing Insight. Collectively, these will set us on a path of inner development that can touch us deeply and open us to a new way of seeing things.

To walk this path we must do more than just read or learn about it. We have to open a space in our lives to do it. Even if we apply ourselves for just a short time each day or week, we can experience results.

A Language of Transformation

Like learning a language, Buddhist practice tends to yield its benefits gradually. We may not notice its effects right away, but one day we may look back and see that our inner life has changed.

Buddhist ideas form a path of inner development in which we overcome limited and negative states of mind and release the mind's potential for more expansive, positive modes of being and awareness. The realization of this potential is often described with words such as *liberation*, *enlightenment*, or *nirvana*. Each of these words describes a shift in perspective. If, for example, our ordinary perspective is analogous to seeing the world through tinted glasses, then liberation, enlightenment, and nirvana represent what happens when we take off those glasses. They are not somewhere we go; they are a different view of the world we encounter every day. This view is to be contrasted with our ordinary, everyday experience, which often includes considerable stress and agitation. These sources of stress and agitation are an important target of Buddhist ideas, so let us take a closer look at them.

Although there are many sources of stress and agitation, modern life in particular is characterized by a level of information and responsibility that has the potential to make us feel overloaded. Modern education alone, for example, requires the assimilation of an ever-increasing body of knowledge, at a younger age, to produce technically capable and productive members of society. Add to this the pressures of work, relationships, and family responsibilities, and the barrage of media and communication made possible by new technologies, and the result is a veritable siege of information and responsibilities. None of these is necessarily intrinsically harmful, but the collective noise level can be very

high, making it difficult to remain inwardly calm and content. Matters can become even more challenging when we confront hardships such as illness, financial difficulties, or other reversals.

More significant still to our well-being are our inner habits and patterns of behavior. Strong cravings and emotional patterns color almost everything we do, sometimes keeping our minds disturbed for long periods. Consider, for example, the grip that anger, lust, envy, or fear can have on the mind, affecting our thoughts and experience for days, months, or even years. These inner states typically are present regardless of our outer endeavors and attainments, and they can be highly resistant to change. Wealth, fame, and other worldly successes, for example, often fail to provide the contentment we anticipated because they do little to change the inner patterns that govern how we think and act.

Buddhist practice is an antidote to the stress and agitation created by these outer and inner forces. Because these forces exert a strong pull, however, we have to create enough momentum to reverse them. Intellectual knowledge, or even meditation alone, may be intriguing or enjoyable, but this may not make it transformative. The methods we apply must be strong enough to make a difference. Buddhist practice creates this momentum by offering a deep path of inner development. It brings together the transformative energy of a teaching lineage with the methods we can each apply to inwardly grow.

A helpful analogy is language. We do not master grammar, syntax, semantics, and other components of language sequentially. Rather, by working on each of them in tandem we slowly build up our capacity. Even if we can do only basic things such as asking simple questions, we still need some experience with the different building blocks of language. To walk the Buddhist path is similar. We must build up experience with its various components in order to gain momentum. In the right combination, even a relatively small effort can have a significant effect. Similarly, just as good teachers are vital to our mastery of language, good teachers, or guides, are indispensable to learning Buddhist ideas; we can think of them as change agents, the catalysts that stimulate and inspire inner development.

Like learning a language, Buddhist practice tends to yield its benefits gradually. We may not notice its effects right away, but one day we may look

back and see that our inner life has changed. We may find that we have a new perspective on the world. We may notice that it takes more to trigger stress, anger, or other emotions that agitate us, or that when such emotions are triggered they do not last as long or go as deep—they may even disappear entirely. We may find that we have more patience and sensitivity to others, and more energy, joy and peace of mind, or we may experience other kinds of changes as the mind becomes more serene and our inner potential unfolds.

Gaining momentum on the Buddhist path has two aspects. First, we need a connection with a school, or lineage, that can teach us. Second, we need to engage its methods of practice. We will examine each of these, beginning with the idea of lineage.

Lineage

Although the outer wrapping of a spiritual lineage is its teachings, style, and methods of practice, at its heart, a spiritual lineage is about transformation. The ultimate role of the Buddhist teacher is to help others actualize their fullest potential for inner well-being and to become a positive force in the world.

Buddhist teachers have long taught the importance of aiming ourselves in a direction that will enhance our inner development. They describe this as a process of “taking refuge” in a path that will protect, strengthen and guide us. Often it is not easy to see what this source of refuge might be. For example, our outer endeavors, such as relationships, jobs, material gains, recreation, and so on, may serve different purposes and fulfill us in various ways, but they often do little to address our inner state. On the contrary, our inner state frequently sets the mood and tone for how we experience outer endeavors.

We also tend to load our outer endeavors with expectations that they cannot fulfill. Modern psychology is confirming what Buddhist teachers have long held: we can be quite poor at predicting what will make us happy. The solution is not to abandon what we do outwardly but to complement our endeavors with a path that nourishes and transforms us inwardly. To make this type of inner change, however, we must aim for it. We must turn our mind toward a source that will help us find it. This is the function of a spiritual lineage. A spiritual lineage is like a power source—something we can plug into to fuel our spiritual growth.

Buddhist thought is not based on a centralized authority or canon but is held in lineages that have spread and evolved over time. Juniper’s lineage is a

long Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition dating back over two thousand years, all the way back to the time of the Buddha. This tradition has flowed through India, Tibet, and other cultures, maturing and adapting to each new time and place.

We know little about the Buddha as a historical figure. What comes to us, instead, is a legend about a Prince Siddhartha Gautama who lived in India around 2,500 years ago. Prince Siddhartha is said to have grown up in a palace, wanting for nothing and sheltered from life's hardships. When he eventually witnessed pain and suffering, he became driven to understand life in a deeper way. To accomplish this, he left behind his life of wealth and privilege and embarked on a spiritual quest. After a number of years as a wandering ascetic, he saw that self-imposed deprivation did not provide the answers either, so he began a long period of meditation and introspection.

During this meditation, Prince Siddhartha experienced the insights that would become the foundation of Buddhist thought. He saw that the primary cause of human suffering is a lack of clarity within the mind. This lack of clarity arises from paying too much attention to extreme ways of apprehending the world. One extreme is to take the world as purely material, focusing exclusively on outer forms and attainments. Another extreme is to abandon outer forms altogether and practice self-deprivation and denial of the material world.

He then asserted that the path to contentment is to find the middle between these extremes. This requires embarking on a path of reflection, mental discipline, and meditation through which we elevate the clarity of our minds and embrace our inner and outer worlds as a coherent whole in which we walk freely. Returning to the world with these insights, Prince Siddhartha began to teach this path and became known as the Buddha, "the awakened one."

Regardless of the historic accuracy of this legend, around the time it is said to have occurred 2,500 years ago, a body of ideas came to life that still stands as one of the great monuments of human thought. The central thesis of these ideas is that the way to spiritual attainment is not through priests, worship, or pleasing the gods but through turning inward and knowing our own minds. According to these ideas, the mind is seen as having tremendous untapped potential for insight, compassion, intuition, and joy, and the way to gain access to this potential is through the proper path of inner development.

Following this inception 2,500 years ago, Buddhist teachings evolved and branched into many schools, or lineages. One of its principle lineages emerged after a period of refinement in the hands of a number of early Indian masters, beginning with Nagarjuna around the years 200 to 300 AD and continuing with classic works such as Shantideva's *The Bodhisattva Way of Life* around the eighth century. The same lineage took a turn around the year 1050 AD, when it was brought to Tibet by the Indian master Atisha, who synthesized it into a systematic approach to developing the mind. A few hundred years later, still in Tibet, these practices were restated once again by Je Tsongkhapa, whose work became the foundation of Tibetan Buddhism's largest school.

The knowledge and practices of this lineage have been passed directly to Juniper from a number of Tibetan Buddhist masters. Juniper's Brazilian-born Segyu Choepel Rinpoche was recognized as a Tibetan Buddhist master and for over twenty-five years was trained by some of its greatest teachers. In particular, he was one of the closest disciples of Kensur Kyabje Lati Rinpoche (1922–2010), one of the most renowned Tibetan Buddhist teachers of recent times. Segyu Rinpoche is a master and holder of these practices, and for more than twenty-five years he has been training and passing them to Juniper's other founders, who will pass them to others in turn. Thus, Juniper is rekindling the flame of this lineage in modern life, preserving, propagating, and evolving its practices in a new culture and time.

Although the outer wrapping of a spiritual lineage is its teachings, style, and methods of practice, at its heart, a spiritual lineage is about transformation. The ultimate role of the Buddhist teacher is to help others actualize their fullest potential for inner well-being and to become a positive force in the world. The function of a Buddhist school is to teach, maintain, hold, and propagate the lineage energy that accomplishes this; to apply that energy to guide others; and to use it to assist those undergoing health and emotional setbacks, including the passage of death and dying. The more we open ourselves to this guidance, the more we begin to trust and unfold our own inner growth and potential.

Making a commitment to embrace the path of a spiritual lineage transforms our efforts from a merely intellectual exercise to an active movement. The goal is to commit ourselves to this path both inwardly—through a mental shift or movement of the will—and outwardly—through engaging in its

practices such as meditation and self-awareness. Because this lineage represents the realization of our inner potential, the process of committing ourselves gives us a spiritual refuge in a lineage, in a path, and in our own inner potential. This effort does not require a withdrawal from or a renunciation of the world; rather, we are connecting with a source of insight and energy from which we can grow and learn and which infuses all aspects of our lives.

As we embrace this idea of lineage, we will gain more clarity and perspective. Eventually, our participation in the world becomes driven less by patterns of craving, aggression, and self-expansion and more by a deep wellspring of contentment, wisdom, and concern, and we in turn become another link in the lineage, cultivating its energy and passing it to others.

Next we turn to the actual practices that comprise this path.

Building Blocks

The result of applying these methods is apparent in the state of mind of those who are accomplished in them. These individuals come from all walks of life and have different styles and personalities. What they have in common is a state of mind that is content and serene; an intuitive wisdom; a radiant, spontaneous energy; and a capacity to inspire and enhance the well-being of others.

Buddhist practice can be divided into four building blocks: Meditation, Balancing Emotions, Cultivating Compassion, and Developing Insight.

Meditation encompasses a rich collection of practices for developing the mind. Integrating meditation into our lives is the foundation of this path. Balancing Emotions means gaining control over the mood and outlook we bring to everything we do. Our inner emotions have an enormous effect on our experience, often impeding our inner growth. Balancing our emotional energy can create a significant shift in our inner well-being, creating new levels of inner strength and tranquility. Cultivating Compassion calls for deepening our sensitivity toward and concern for others. This creates a wave of positive energy that adds meaning to and enriches both our own lives and the lives of those around us. Finally, Developing Insight leads to the wisdom that expands our awareness and frees us from limiting perspectives and conventions. Collectively, these methods will launch us on a lifelong journey of growth, discovery, and new experiences.

The result of applying these methods is apparent in the state of mind of those who are accomplished in them. These individuals come from all walks of life and have different styles and personalities. What they have in common is a

state of mind that is content and serene; an intuitive wisdom; a radiant, spontaneous energy; and a capacity to inspire and enhance the well-being of others. Their path to gaining these qualities is no different from the one described here. It may have a different wrapper, depending on the culture and time, but invariably it encompasses the same building blocks, in one form or another.

Meditation

Meditation is the essential modality of developing the mind. We can think of it as exercise. Just as physical exercise strengthens the body, meditation strengthens the mind. Similarly, just as reading about the benefits of physical exercise will not make us physically fit, intellectual knowledge about meditation will not make us inwardly fit. Meditating, and putting to work what we gain from meditation, is how we turn intellectual ideas into realization.

We practice two principle types of meditation: concentration meditation and analytical meditation. In concentration meditation, we hold the mind on an object, such as the breath or a visualized image, building up our capacity to focus and overcome inner agitation and lethargy. This strengthens the mind by making it more stable and focused. It is an antidote to the mind's rapid swings and agitation. As we build experience with concentration meditation, we gain increasing levels of mental stability, tranquility, and strength.

In analytical meditation, we use the mind's capacity for contemplation and reason to raise our awareness about specific topics so that they may take hold within us. Examples include analyzing how our emotions become out of balance, examining how our inner stories and patterns of behavior often do not match how things actually exist, and enhancing our sensitivity to and concern for others. By repeatedly familiarizing ourselves with these and other topics, we become more attuned to them and more capable of integrating them into our lives. This process of assimilating Buddhist ideas also calls for study and discussion of various related topics. The clearer these topics become to us, the more effective will be our meditation and efforts to assimilate them.

There is a third class of meditation called "deity yoga." The term yoga means "union" or "joining together." As a mental discipline, yoga meditation is a

means of energizing the body and mind by making a mental union with images and symbols that represent the potential of the mind. These symbols are frequently depicted as deities and geometric designs called mandalas. These are, in fact, metaphoric depictions of the spiritual lineage and the mind's full potential. Deity yoga meditation is a means to tap into this potential and embody it within our own minds. This type of meditation is best learned after establishing a foundation in Buddhist ideas, under the guidance of a qualified teacher and teaching lineage.

Often, when we first try meditation of any kind, we encounter the mind's state of agitation, head-on. After just a few seconds the mind wanders. We bring it back and it wanders again. Over and over it drifts, often jumping from one thought to another. Or we may find ourselves feeling drowsy or falling asleep, unable to concentrate on anything at all. The mind oscillates between excitement and lethargy, like a little dog that is either barking excitedly or sleeping. As we work on meditation, however, we develop more capacity to bring these inner swings under control and to make the mind more stable and serene. Eventually, we find that this healthier state of mind is not something we experience only during meditation; it will begin to influence all our endeavors, bringing to everything we do a more patient, calm, and serene inner state.

Proficiency in meditation is acquired through repeated effort. The best way to develop the mind is through gradual change and refinement. It is like dripping water that slowly smooths and polishes jagged rock. Meditation is the water, gradually refining and polishing the mind.

Meditation is a learned skill, something in which we build competence over time. Regular practice is more important than the length of the practice, so it is better to have a meditation session for even a few minutes once or twice a day than to have longer sessions less frequently. The attitude we bring to meditation also is important. We should try not to treat this as just another goal to achieve. This is not about performance. We will not accomplish it by measuring, rushing, or comparing ourselves. We should try to see meditation as a no-pressure zone in our lives, an undertaking that we approach without expectation, pressure, or judgment.

How do we know if our meditation is working? Buddhist practice is about transforming ourselves inwardly. The measure of successful meditation is

not what happens while we are meditating, nor even how adept at meditating we become, but whether we are growing inwardly and positively transforming how we live in, react to, and engage the world.

Balancing Emotions

The next building block is Balancing Emotions. One of the great insights of Buddhist thought is the central role of emotions and inner patterns of behavior in our experience. Strong cravings and emotional patterns color almost everything we do, sometimes keeping our minds disturbed for long periods and often upsetting our personal and professional lives. Although our emotions are normal aspects of experience, they can become like mental prisons. A single word, or even a look, from another person can trigger a range of emotions that consumes us for hours, weeks, or longer. These inner states typically are present regardless of our outer endeavors and attainments, and they can be highly resistant to change. Wealth, fame, and other worldly successes, for example, often fail to provide the contentment we anticipated because they do little to change the emotions and patterns of behavior that govern how we feel.

Emotions and inner patterns of behavior arise like waves of energy within us. They take the form of feelings and reactions that play out over and over again. These patterns are very habitual: a trigger comes and the pattern arises. Sometimes, we do not even need the trigger; the pattern is just there. This emotional energy incites us to action, driving our mood, experience, and interactions with others. It can make us do things we do not want to do, leaving us to rationalize our behavior or to regret our actions. When our emotional energy rises, it is difficult to dissipate it at will. It needs to run its course. Consider, for example, how anger, envy, resentment, lust, and other emotions can dominate our mood and attention. Buddhist ideas give us tools to bring these waves of emotional energy into balance.

To gain this balance, first, we have to commit to learning about ourselves and growing. This is often not as easy as it sounds. For example, we have a strong tendency to blame problems on outer conditions—the boss, the neighbor, the friend, the economy, the family, the environment, and so on. We tend to convince ourselves that if outer circumstances were to change—if we

had more money, more fun, more friends, more free time, more respect, better relationships, and so on—things would be better. However, although outer changes may help, we often give them too much weight, and we have difficulty seeing the obstacles created by the inner forces at work.

Once we acknowledge the importance of looking within ourselves, we have to elevate our awareness of how our emotions and patterns of behavior affect us. We begin to see the impact on our lives of our emotions, our inner patterns of behavior, and the inner stories that dictate how we see ourselves and the world around us. Becoming aware of these inner forces is key to changing them. Just the awareness can make a difference.

Having enhanced our awareness of our emotions and patterns of behavior, we can apply remedies that will reduce or eliminate those that cause inner agitation. These remedies include committing to a path of inner development, meditating, exercising self-restraint, and cultivating positive modes of thought and action. Buddhist practice guides how to do each of these.

However, we must be careful not to suppress or bury our emotions; then the energy just finds its way somewhere else. Instead, by gently robbing negative emotional patterns of their power and by practicing positive modes of thought and action, we bring balance to our inner lives and our minds will become gradually habituated to remaining calm, stable, and clear.

Cultivating Compassion

Central to the development of Buddhist thought is the principle that our spiritual maturity does not involve escaping from the world but entails transforming our perspective and becoming more effective participants in the world. Training and disciplining one's mind to bring clarity, peace, and harmony to oneself and others is seen as a cornerstone to one's inner potential and spiritual maturity. Long ago, this was captured in the ideal of the bodhisattva, the enlightened hero committed to freeing himself or herself inwardly in order to become a force of clarity and well-being for others.

Cultivating compassion is also an antidote to the harmful aspects of too much self-absorption. We can be so wrapped up in the "I" and the "mine" that our world becomes driven by self-cherishing and self-indulgence. This self-

oriented mentality is an instinctual part of our makeup but, in excess, it limits the mind's potential, narrowing our world and causing inner stress.

Enhancing our capacity for compassion loosens these tendencies, bringing greater meaning, perspective, and positive energy to our lives. For example, highly self-absorbed individuals tend to be takers rather than givers, bending the world to their needs and point of view. In contrast, a person whose heart is big and who is genuinely sensitive, generous, and kind to others emits a different type of energy. One feels at ease around them and is nourished by their openness and concern. This type of personal charisma and energy is vaster than the energy of self-absorption; the energy of self-absorption feeds only one person, whereas the energy of compassion and sensitivity feeds many.

Cultivating Compassion is as much about a shift in attitude as a shift in action. Care and concern for others is a way of thinking and being. It is a quality that we radiate, whether at home, at work, or anywhere we might be. This does not mean we must always give in to the needs of others. It does mean that, even when we are faced with difficult choices or need to be strong and firm, we can still do so in ways that are compassionate and free from unnecessary aggression or anger.

The process of Cultivating Compassion includes developing sensitivity and concern for others and counteracting the negative aspects of our own self-centered tendencies. We do this through specific meditations and through monitoring our behavior and actions. For example, everywhere we go, from school, to work, to the line at the grocery store, is an opportunity to apply sensitivity and concern, even through a gesture as simple as a smile or a hello.

The other building blocks of this path also contribute to Cultivating Compassion. For example, Balancing Emotions makes us more patient and less consumed by our own needs. Developing Insight gives us perspective and clarity to see others in a different light. This illustrates how the different aspects of this path work together.

Developing Insight

The final building block—Developing Insight—focuses not so much on how we live and act in the world as on how we apprehend the world. Earlier, we

described how ordinary perception is like seeing the world through tinted glasses. The methods of Developing Insight enable us to examine the nature of that tint.

One of the seminal insights of the early Buddhist masters is that the reality in our heads is not the same as reality itself, that this dissonance is the cause of much hardship, and that we can change it. We can expand our inner view and create a new vision of life. It is not unlike the way a telescope lens influences our information about the stars. When we upgrade the lens, we upgrade the information. Similarly, the mind is like a lens, constructing an image of reality. Thus, when we upgrade the mind, we upgrade our experience of reality. This is the function of Developing Insight.

At the heart of Developing Insight is the idea that the mind's ordinary mode of perceiving reality is a limited one. The mind uses concepts and images to paint a picture of reality, which enables us to function, but this does not mean the mind is painting an accurate picture. For example, the world appears flat when we look at the horizon, and for thousands of years humans believed the world was flat. Now, of course, we understand that this is an illusion.

It is easy to see the limitations of perception in this example, but Buddhist teachers also hold that our perception of ordinary objects, from cups and books to our view of the self, also masks their underlying nature. We see things as fixed, separate, and autonomous when in fact they are interdependent and in a constant state of change. We give concepts and perceptions that appear to the mind more concreteness than they actually possess. The same holds true for the stories, customs, and conventions that define our worldview. Through Developing Insight we learn how the customs and habits by which we live are merely conventions to which we have become habituated. They are not as rigid as we might feel.

Thus, Developing Insight is a process of deconstructing ideas, perceptions and beliefs and seeing the extent to which they are merely conventional or provisional rather than fixed truths about the way things are. This opens the mind to a more expansive perspective and frees us from inner limits. Basing our actions on a foundation of insight enables us to experience greater inner freedom, ease and flow. Meditating on and integrating the ideas of Developing Insight is a way to infuse our experience with these attributes.

We also will find that the perspective of Developing Insight accords with modern discoveries. In biology, physics, sociology, and other fields, objective theories about a fixed, autonomous reality have given way to a picture of a reality that is interdependent. This is precisely the view described in the Buddhist insight practices, and it is through these practices that we bring the mind into alignment with this picture.

We have now identified each of the building blocks of Buddhist ideas—Meditation, Balancing Emotions, Cultivating Compassion, and Developing Insight. As we gain experience with them, we will see that they work together, mutually enhancing one another and bringing about inner growth and spiritual maturity. Next, we will look at the effect on our lives as we mature spiritually.

Spiritual Maturity

Our spiritual maturity is like learning how to fly. Meditation and balancing our emotions enhance our inner stability and strength, creating a strong inner core and enhancing our well-being. Then we add the wings—insight on one side, compassion on the other.

Buddhist practice can be thought of as a path of personal evolution. It matures the quality of the energy that we feel and project to the world. We have seen examples of this in the earlier discussions about balancing our emotional energy and about comparing how self-absorption emits a different quality of energy than compassion. Being inwardly agitated or excessively self-absorbed, for example, impacts not just the quality of our inner life but how we encounter and communicate with others. As we overcome the drag caused by these inner patterns, we become inwardly free and able to shine, both within ourselves and to the world around us. Spiritual growth is a means to evoke and radiate this stream of positive energy and strength.

The practices we have described here—Meditation, Balancing Emotions, Cultivating Compassion, and Developing Insight—each work on enhancing the flow of our inner energy and strength. Gaining experience with these building blocks prepares us for a collection of practices that we described earlier called “deity yoga.” These are special meditations that further energize the body and mind by making a mental union (yoga) with images and symbols that represent the potential of the mind. These meditations enhance the radiance, vitality and positive energy we experience and communicate to the world.

When our energy is strong and flowing well, we experience a surge in vitality that infuses our lives and is palpable to others. When it is weak, blocked, or labored, our vitality is correspondingly impeded. Spiritual growth is about enhancing our inner energy and giving it a strong, balanced and harmonious flow. Connecting with a spiritual lineage and engaging a path of inner development is a means to do this. Our spiritual maturity occurs as this way of being becomes part of us. In contrast, moving in the opposite direction—by sinking into rigidity, excess emotion, self-absorption, lack of focus, and so on—will block the flow of our inner energy, with corresponding effects on our inner vitality and strength. The purpose of a spiritual lineage and path is to precipitate the emergence of this inner energy, well-being, and strength.

Our spiritual maturity is like learning how to fly. Meditation and balancing our emotions enhance our inner stability and strength, creating a strong inner core and enhancing our well-being. Then we add the wings—insight on one side, compassion on the other. As we grow spiritually, we learn to stretch each wing—on the one side, feeling the insight that sees beyond limited views and brings clarity, insight, and awareness, and on the other side, engaging the world with vitality, charisma, and compassion. When both wings are working in unison, we experience a surge of freedom and joy, and become a strong, positive force that continues to fly and grow in a constantly changing world.

Starting Where We Are

This path is about enhancing the potential of the mind—your mind—whatever your starting place may be.

We have now completed the picture of the basic structure of the Buddhist path, from connecting with a Buddhist lineage to the various methods of developing the mind. The fundamental idea is that by training the mind in the correct way we can create the inner momentum to transform our experience and gain new levels of insight and awareness. We can break the inner patterns that create hardship and stress; engage life with spontaneity, serenity, and insight; and release our potential to become a positive, compassionate force in the world. The more we progress along this path, the more these qualities manifest themselves within us.

The best way to explore Buddhist ideas is with an open mind and a willingness to make some effort. We have to take charge of our inner life and work on it. Intellectual understanding alone is not enough; it is necessary to make an effort to meditate and to assimilate the different elements of the path. Given an open mind and a consistent effort, however, the encounter with Buddhist practice can be a profound undertaking, tapping into a transformational lineage that dates back more than two thousand years, tracing the path walked by some of humanity's greatest thinkers and yogis. Using their insight and inspiration, we can launch ourselves into a lifelong practice of inner growth and nourishment that will enhance the quality of whatever we do. To begin, we recommend Juniper's *Guide: Learning to Meditate*.

One may ask, "How far can I really go with this? My mind is so distracted I can't meditate for ten seconds. I don't understand this talk about

reality, and I have too many of my own problems to do much for others!”

However, this path is about enhancing the potential of the mind—your mind—whatever your starting place may be. Each of us has inner blocks, patterns, and rigidity that trip us up. Buddhist practice is about undoing these impediments and expanding our freedom and awareness. Therefore, the Buddhist path of inner development is a journey that begins wherever you are right now. The goal is to make the engagement with Buddhist ideas—however far we can or choose to take it—a wellspring of spiritual nourishment and support. We may be surprised at the power even small gains can give us, and our capacity may be even greater than we can imagine.