

*The
Buddhic Essence*

Ten Stages to Becoming a Buddha



Elizabeth Clare Prophet

MYSTICAL PATHS OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

The Buddhic Essence

Ten Stages to Becoming a Buddha



Elizabeth Clare Prophet

SUMMIT UNIVERSITY  PRESS®
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The Buddhist Essence

Ten Stages to Becoming a Buddha

by Elizabeth Clare Prophet

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The Flower Sermon

Gautama Buddha taught not only through discourse and example but also, at times, through symbols and imagery. His Flower Sermon exemplifies the transmission of wisdom through direct experience.

One day on Vulture Peak, while the disciples were seated in rapt attention, the Buddha came before the assembly and silently held up a flower. Only Mahakasyapa (Universal Light Drinker) smiled, indicating his understanding.

Buddha confirmed that a transmission of the Enlightened Mind had taken place without any words being spoken.



Introduction

In this volume, Elizabeth Clare Prophet illumines our pathway to Buddhahood. Drawing upon traditional and modern Buddhist teachings, illustrations and stories, she shows how we can begin tracing the path that leads from where we are today to complete Buddhic enlightenment.

In the first half of the book, Mrs. Prophet lays the foundation for the ten stages of this path. She begins with the premise that we all contain the seed of Buddhahood, called the Buddha-nature. She describes the transcendental force of *bodhicitta*, the “cosmic will for universal salvation,” and explains specific devotional practices that cultivate the conditions in which it can arise. Those who vow to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all life are called *bodhisattvas*. Mrs. Prophet offers insight into the mind and heart of the

bodhisattva and elucidates the nature of vows and their transcendent power to tether the bodhisattva to his goal.

The second half of the book outlines the traditional ten stages of the bodhisattva's path to Buddhahood. Mrs. Prophet describes ten transcendental virtues the aspirant perfects along the way and offers insightful tips for developing them. She defines the "three bodies of the Buddha" the aspirant to Buddhahood merges with. And in conclusion, she explains how Buddhist mantras help us overcome obstacles to spiritual growth while increasing wisdom, compassion, forgiveness and joy.

A PATH OF WISDOM AND COMPASSION

Gautama Buddha's discourses and dialogues are recorded in the Buddhist *sutras* (literally "threads on which jewels are strung"). Some sutras were preached directly by Gautama; others were recited by a disciple either in the Buddha's presence or under his direct inspiration. A few sutras contain the words of transcendent bodhisattvas, beings with the attainment of Buddhahood; these conclude with the Buddha's approval of the teaching they contain. Regardless of the form of delivery, the sutras are all said to emanate from the Enlightened Mind. The sutras, along with the rules of discipline and expository teachings, constitute the wisdom aspect of the Buddha's teachings.

Compassion is another hallmark of Buddhism. Those who observed Gautama Buddha's life spoke of his compas-

sionate behavior and of the practical assistance he gave to so many. His living example of compassion constitutes an equally important aspect of his teaching.

These twin ideals of wisdom and compassion are embodied in the *bodhisattva ideal*. The bodhisattva strives to attain the wisdom of Buddhahood while compassionately dedicating himself to the salvation of all.

IDEAL ROLE MODELS

Buddhism speaks of earthly bodhisattvas and transcendent (celestial or great) bodhisattvas. Earthly bodhisattvas strive for enlightenment while expressing altruism and compassion for others. Transcendent bodhisattvas have the attainment of a Buddha but have postponed their entry into ultimate nirvana (complete liberation) until all beings realize enlightenment. The great bodhisattvas dwell in the heaven-world, assisting and guiding us toward enlightenment, yet they can assume any physical form they desire in order to offer assistance to life. Their perfect balance of wisdom and compassion makes them ideal role models.

Manjushri is the great Bodhisattva of Wisdom, revered by Buddhists as the patron of arts and sciences and the master of eloquence. In some traditions, Manjushri is said to have become a perfectly enlightened Buddha many aeons ago in another universe. Because wisdom is essential to liberation from suffering, Manjushri is a herald of emancipation.

Kuan Yin, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, is perhaps the most well-known transcendent bodhisattva. She is at times depicted in masculine form and is known by various names, among them Avalokiteshvara and Chenrezi. According to legend, Kuan Yin was about to enter heaven but paused on the threshold as the cries of the world reached her ears. The Kuan Yin Sutra, a chapter of the Lotus Sutra, contains the Buddha's teaching on the Universal Gate of Kuan Yin. In Buddhism, a gate is an entrance to the dharma (the Buddha's teachings), a beginning toward awakening. Kuan Yin's universal gate, being immensely wide, can accommodate innumerable beings. Thus, Kuan Yin makes it possible for all to follow the path to Buddhahood.

It is our prayer that Mrs. Prophet's presentation of *The Buddhic Essence* will help you discover your own Buddha-nature and will illumine the path you walk toward enlightenment and Buddhahood.

The Editors

Buddhas and Immortals

A theme in ancient Buddhist literature is the creation of the world by a Mother Goddess, the Eternal Venerable Mother, who sent down to earth ninety-six myriads of her children. They were originally Buddhas and immortals, but once on earth they forgot their true home in paradise.

They grew attached to fame, profit and sensual pleasures. Trapped by these desires, they became enmeshed in samsara (the sea of suffering). And so the Great Law required them to repeatedly die and be reborn that they might recognize the transient nature of their desires.

The Venerable Mother grieved for her lost children and sent down messenger deities to remind them of their true nature and the way back home. These messengers were Buddhas who had passed all the initiations of the bodhisattvas.

It is prophesied that at the end of the time of trials the Venerable Mother's children will recover their original wholeness and be reunited. There is also the hope in this ancient literature that the world itself will be changed into a realm of perfect bliss.





Crowned Buddha or Bodhisattva, life size, painted cloth over wood, around 350 years old. The crown symbolizes the Buddha's sovereignty and is sometimes used to depict Buddhas in the Body of Bliss. The topknot or cranial knob (Skt. usnisa) symbolizes his wisdom, openness and spiritual dominion as an enlightened being.



Buddha-Nature Is Universal

Within Buddhist scripture is Gautama Buddha's teaching that all beings have within them the *Buddha-nature*—the essence, or seed, of Buddhahood. We have the seed of Buddhahood right inside of us. And because we have it, we have the potential to become a Buddha.

One way I define Buddhism is “the igniting of the internal being of God.” Isn't this what we are all seeking? We have the hope that somehow something inside of us can be ignited. We seek to become more than we are currently expressing. And when we become that “more,” we will let go of certain things that we currently believe ourselves to be but which, in Reality, we are not.

As we study and ponder the mystical paths of the world's religions, we see that these seemingly different paths do in fact converge. It is almost as though, when we hear a teaching

from one of them, we wonder whether it is from the mystical path of Buddhism or Christianity or Hinduism, Judaism or Islam or Taoism, et cetera, because we are hearing the very same things from each of them. Confirmation of the same inner spiritual path comes from many different peoples in different ages, from different languages and cultures, from different prophets and teachers. The mystical paths all come to this one and single conclusion: *that the ultimate goal of the path is union with God, with Reality, with the Absolute.*

I desire to see people liberated from having to defend their personal experiences and beliefs based on what they or others associate with a particular religion. I would like them to be able to take all of the threads of this one point that is made in the mystical path of each religion and simply know that those Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists, Jews, Christians, Muslims and others who follow a mystical path all believe this. It is wonderfully liberating to realize that not millions of people at one time but millions of people from all times and all ages have sought and realized union with God.

In this book we are going to look at the path that our beloved Gautama Buddha has developed for entering into and realizing this ultimate union.

BECOMING THE TEACHING

An ancient Buddhist text proclaims, “The road to Buddhahood is open to all. At all times have all living beings the Germ of Buddhahood in them.”¹ Tibetan lama and

scholar Geshe Ngawang Wangyal writes, “There exists in each living being the potential for attaining Buddhahood, called the Buddha-essence..., the ‘legacy abiding within.’... This Buddha-essence... is untainted by any defilement, existing as pure from the very beginning even though in the midst of afflictive emotions.”²

One of Gautama’s most important legacies was his message to seek nothing outside of our self, to go within and become the Buddha as he had. He took the role of guide and exemplar to show us the way. This point is illustrated with a glimpse into the life of Ananda, one of Gautama Buddha’s great disciples.

Ananda, a cousin of Gautama, was his personal assistant for twenty-five years. He is said to have attended the Buddha with great devotion and to have acted with compassion toward all. Ananda’s chief renown, however, is for his brilliant mind and retentive memory. It is said that he could recite from memory every sermon the Buddha had delivered. In many of the sutras that begin with the words “Thus have I heard,” the speaker is Ananda.

Despite Ananda’s intellectual grasp of the teaching, the Buddha scolded him for not understanding the nature of his true mind. The Surangama (Heroic Gate) Sutra records the Buddha’s words:

You have learned the Teachings by listening to the words of Lord Buddha and then committing them to memory.

*Why do you not learn from your own self by listening to the sound of the Intrinsic Dharma within your own Mind and then practising reflection upon it?*³

Through this and other instruction the Buddha gave to Ananda and others on that occasion, Ananda realized that he had not followed the injunction of the Buddha to become the teaching. The sutra records Ananda's remorse:

*After I left home to follow the Buddha, I merely relied on His transcendental power and always thought that I could dispense with practice since He would bestow samadhi upon me. I did not know that He could not be my substitute and so lost (sight of) my fundamental Mind. This is why, though I joined the Order, my mind was unable to enter the Tao. I was like a destitute son running away from his father. I only realize now that, in spite of much listening (to the Dharma), if I do not practise it, I shall come to nothing as if I had not heard it, like a man who cannot satisfy his hunger by merely speaking of food.*⁴

As the Buddha's life was drawing to a close, Ananda was grief-stricken over the impending loss and distraught with thoughts that he would have to strive for perfection without the aid of the Buddha. The Digha Nikaya records that the Buddha consoled him, saying three times, "For a long time, Ānanda, you have been very near to me by acts of love, kind and good, never varying, beyond all measure." The Buddha then urged Ananda to apply himself in earnest

and said that he would soon realize emancipation.

On an occasion when another disciple teased Ananda for his lack of attainment despite his close association with the Buddha, Gautama prophesied that Ananda would attain liberation “in this very life.” And he did: Buddhist records state that Ananda attained nirvana (liberation) on the eve of the First Buddhist Council, shortly after the Buddha’s death.

THE BLESSINGS OF ALL THE BUDDHAS

The fortieth chapter of the Avatamsaka (Flower Ornament) Sutra speaks of a perennial seeker named Sudhana (Good Wealth). In his search for enlightenment, Sudhana is said to have visited or studied with a total of fifty-three spiritual teachers. According to Buddhist tradition, he became the equal of the Buddhas in one lifetime.

Guidance from a spiritual director or guru (teacher) is fundamental to many religious paths, the bodhisattva path included. By the diligent practice of the teachings given by a true spiritual teacher, the disciple gains the blessings of all the Buddhas. Tibetan lama Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche explained this principle in his book *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel*:

If one sees the teacher merely as an ordinary being, then one will receive only the “blessings” of ordinary beings; if one sees him as an arhat [worthy one]..., then one will receive the corresponding blessings; if one sees the teacher as a bodhisattva, one will receive the blessings of the bodhisattvas. If, however, one can see the teacher as a

buddha, then one will receive the blessings of the buddhas.

[The guru] is like . . . a wish-fulfilling jewel granting all the qualities of realization, a father and a mother giving their love equally to all sentient beings, a great river of compassion, a mountain rising above worldly concerns unshaken by the winds of emotions, and a great cloud filled with rain to soothe the torments of the passions. In brief, he is the equal of all the buddhas. To make any connection with him, whether through seeing him, hearing his voice, remembering him, or being touched by his hand, will lead us toward liberation. To have full confidence in him is the sure way to progress toward enlightenment. The warmth of his wisdom and compassion will melt the ore of our being and release the gold of the buddha-nature within.⁵

SHAN TS'AI: THE SEARCH FOR A TEACHER

A popular legend tells of the seeker Shan Ts'ai (Virtuous Talent), a disciple and attendant of Kuan Yin. As a youth, Shan Ts'ai came to study under Kuan Yin when she was embodied as Miao Shan (Wondrously Kind One), a princess who became a bodhisattva. The legend illustrates the importance of the teacher for the disciple.

Shan Ts'ai was a crippled Indian youth who desired above all to study the Buddha-dharma (the teachings of the Buddha). Word reached him that a masterful Buddhist teacher, Miao Shan, dwelled on the rocky island of P'u-t'o and he undertook the arduous journey to that place.

Eventually he found Miao Shan and beseeched her to instruct him in the dharma.

Before accepting Shan Ts'ai as a disciple, Miao Shan determined to first test his dedication and resolve. To this end she created the illusion of three pirates brandishing swords and running uphill toward her. She fled toward the edge of a cliff with the pirates in swift pursuit.

Believing that his teacher was in grave danger, Shan Ts'ai hobbled up the hill to defend her. As the pirates neared Miao Shan, she jumped over the cliff's edge. The pirates quickly followed. When Shan Ts'ai reached the edge of the cliff, he crawled over, lost his balance and fell.

Miao Shan halted Shan Ts'ai's fall in midair. (The illusory pirates had vanished.) Miao Shan then asked Shan Ts'ai to walk, whereupon he discovered that he could walk normally and was no longer crippled. When he glanced into a pool of water, he saw that he was now handsome; his face, too, had been transformed.

Convinced of Shan Ts'ai's dedication, Miao Shan accepted him as a disciple and taught him the entire teaching of the Buddha.

PRACTICAL REASONS TO WALK THE PATH

We may not realize that we took our first steps on the path to becoming a Buddha long ago, perhaps many lifetimes ago, and that we are simply picking up the path from where we left off. But whether or not we desire to become

a Buddha, there are practical reasons to apply ourselves to the disciplines of this path.

On a personal level, those who strive to master the steps that lead to Buddhahood may win their freedom from the rounds of rebirth at the end of their present life or at least be reborn in better circumstances for spiritual evolution in their next life.

From a global perspective, we understand that the circumstances of life that we and future generations will see tomorrow depend on our decisions and actions today. All of the enlightened ones that have ever lived on this earth have come to bring about changes for the better. They have come to relieve the sorrowful situations that we find in this world, to bind up the wounds of mankind, to heal the brokenhearted, to ameliorate the problems of race and other misunderstandings, to give the children of this world a better future. They have come and they are still here working with mankind.

We have an opportunity to mark this moment as the point in time when we looked to the future and realized that what we plant now will be here for all who come after us. They will inherit the earth, they will inherit the consequences of what we do, and they will see the result of the vision we had when we embarked upon this path. The actions we take today will have repercussions far into the future. So today is our opportunity to dedicate ourselves to bringing this earth into a golden age.

Reflection on the Essence



- *What is your vision of the future for yourself, your loved ones, and for the earth?*
- *What contribution would you desire to make toward the achievement of your vision?*
- *What one small step (whether an action or a preliminary step) could you commit to today that would plant a seed toward the unfolding of your vision?*

Notes

CHAPTER 1 ~ *Buddha-Nature Is Universal*

1. *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1:28, in Edward Conze et al., eds., *Buddhist Texts through the Ages* (1954; reprint, New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1964), p. 181.
2. Geshe Wangyal, *The Jewelled Staircase* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications, 1986), p. 161.
3. *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, quoted in Lama Anagarika Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1969), p. 47.
4. *The Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, trans. Lu K'uan Yü (New Delhi: B. I. Publications, 1978), p. 19.
5. Dilgo Khyentse, *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel: The Practice of Guru Yoga according to the Longchen Nyingthig Tradition* (Boston: Shambhala, 1988), pp. 10, 11.

CHAPTER 2 ~ *The Birth of the Bodhisattva Path in You*

1. Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), p. 329.
2. Nikkyo Niwano, *A Guide to the Threefold Lotus Sutra*, trans. Eugene Langston (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing, 1981), p. 129.
3. See *Densal* 15, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2000), p. 9.

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ELIZABETH CLARE PROPHET is a world-renowned author. Among her bestselling titles are *Fallen Angels and the Origins of Evil*, *The Lost Years of Jesus*, *Reincarnation: The Missing Link in Christianity*, *Kabbalah: Key to Your Inner Power*, from the *Mystical Paths of the World's Religions* series, and her *Pocket Guides to Practical Spirituality* series, which includes *Your Seven Energy Centers*, *Karma and Reincarnation*, *The Story of Your Soul*, and *Violet Flame to Heal Body, Mind and Soul*.

She has pioneered techniques in practical spirituality, including the creative power of sound for personal growth and world transformation.

A wide selection of her books have been translated into a total of 29 languages worldwide.

Mrs. Prophet retired in 1999 and is now living in Montana's Rocky Mountains. The unpublished works of Mark L. Prophet and Elizabeth Clare Prophet continue to be published by Summit University Press.

www.ElizabethClareProphet.org

Becoming a Buddha...

"Within Buddhist scripture is Gautama Buddha's teaching that all beings have within them the *Buddha-nature*—the essence, or seed, of Buddhahood.

"We have the seed of Buddhahood right inside of us. And because we have it, we have the potential to become a Buddha."

—from *THE BUDDHIC ESSENCE*

In *The Buddhic Essence: Ten Stages to Becoming a Buddha*, author Elizabeth Clare Prophet gently traces the pathway that leads to Buddhahood. She does so in such a way that we can personally relate to the different stages and also see within them steps that we can accomplish in the course of our daily lives.

The journey to Buddhahood is a journey not measured in distance or time. Its markers are self-knowledge and a yearning for something within that beckons the soul to take the next step in her spiritual journey.

"The road to Buddhahood is open to all. At all times have all living beings the Germ of Buddhahood in them."

—RATNAGOTRAVIBHAGA 1:28



ELIZABETH CLARE PROPHET is the author of many books, including *Kabbalah: Key to Your Inner Power*, *Fallen Angels and the Origins of Evil* and *The Lost Years of Jesus*. A wide selection of her books is available worldwide, translated into a total of 29 languages.

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