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Seeing Mind, Being Body

Contemplative Practice and Buddhist Epistemology

ANNE CAROLYN KLEIN

Overview

From the earliest days of Buddhist teachings, it was made clear that neither the teaching itself, nor the realization of it, was a matter simply of speaking words or of understanding them. Refuge, for example, is something Buddhists recite every day. Yet refuge is not just words. It is an experience born of learning, reflection, and the wisdom of meditation that these make possible. This wisdom, though widely described as inconceivable and inexpressible, is capable of becoming fully evident. The practices that make it evident go beyond texts to include posture, chanting, movement, imagination, the performing and visual arts, ethical orientation, and more. These are related not only with words or ideas but also with the felt sense of the body, touching on the shifts in energy that accompany even the most elementary practices.

The wisdom of meditation requires the movement of energy. This energy is the mount or steed of consciousness and experientially all but indistinguishable from knowing itself. These energies must be part of what we consider when we look into the living practices of Buddhist communities.

Body as Dynamic Mystery

Meditation practices are the revered heart of Buddhist culture, even if relatively few persons seriously engage them. Meditation is the culmination of the three wisdoms of listening, reflection, and meditation.¹ Our way of inquiring into meditation and meditators will focus not only on their texts and instructions or even on the practices themselves. We take interest in the multiple dimensions of learning that these practices are meant to foster: physical, aesthetic, psychological, emotional, energetic, sensory, intentional, and attentional.

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Meditation engages the entire being, not just the intellect. Above all, it engages the body and the body's intrinsic dynamism. We want to see how this dynamism participates in Buddhist practice; how it is a category that suffuses mind as well as body; and how it offers a fresh way to organize what we know of Buddhist thought and culture in relation to meditation.

Often overlooked, especially in non-esoteric contexts, are the energetic flows of the body. Yet these have a role to play in each of the three main areas of Buddhist practice: the cultivation of attention, of loving compassion, and of wisdom. Knowing that the texts, images, chants, and practices of Buddhist traditions address this energetic sensibility, we can read texts differently and understand contemplative practice differently as well. This difference is our focus here.

Using this bodily dynamism or energy as an organizing principle, I will be pointing out three things. First, this often overlooked, or under-analyzed category is important for a fuller picture of Buddhist religious life. Second, its importance by no means undermines, and in fact extends, the significance of the philosophical import of Buddhist literature. Third, the significance of "energy" is not limited to esoteric Buddhism. To aid this discussion, I am introducing and exploring the new term "energetic sensibility" as a way of referring to the cluster of important Buddhist terms associated with the viscerally energetic or dynamic dimension of persons and their practices.

Persons and Practice

A full picture of the human organism to whom practices and instructions are addressed will include these energies, and such a picture is vital to success, both in practice and in academic contemplative studies. These are a significant category in every classic Buddhist iteration of what a human being is: When the narrative of the five *skandhas*, or aggregates, is used, the consciousness *skandha* is described as riding a wind-horse of energy. When a person is described in terms of the five elements – earth, water, fire, wind, and space – each of these elements finds its most subtle expression in a particular type of dynamism, or energy. These energies are crucial for achieving the kind of stability, expansiveness, or receptivity associated with certain contemplative practices.

All practice also involves body, speech, and mind. These are referred to in Buddhist literature as the "three gates" by which one accumulates karma, or moves along the path to transcending karma. It is a crucial cultural given that "speech" here refers not simply to verbal expression but also to energy (Tb. *rlung*; Skt *prāṇa*; Ch. *ch'i*). No less an authority than the eighteenth-century scholar-poet-visionary Jigme Lingpa states concisely in one of his *Wisdom Chats* that "The essence of speech is energy."² From this, as well as from the oral commentary of contemporary Tibetan luminaries such as Chögyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, we see that "speech" (Tb. *ngag*) as a category includes the energy or wind upon which speech rides and upon which the mind directing speech also always rides.

Such energy is intimately conflated with knowing, such that attention to the sensation itself is sufficient for sense or meaning to be present. Direct awareness of it is the province of the energetic sensibility, which is not separate from the steed of energy itself. This energetic sensibility³ is indispensable to our understanding of how contemplative

practices – and the texts, rituals, music, or contexts in which they are embedded – engage human being.

In terms of the five senses, the energetic sensibility integrates a subtle sense of touch with an awareness which is not interpretive but which simply and immediately knows what that touch signifies. A common example is butterflies in the stomach: you know immediately how that feels and what it means about your psycho-emotional state. On the other hand, a sense of expansiveness, of opening like a flower or entering a vast and quiet ocean, immediately impacts your sense not only of your mood but, potentially, of your very being. Buddhist physiology takes the tactile sense to be the underlying basis for experiencing the other senses. That the sense of touch is said to be the last to dissolve in the process of dying tells us that Tibetan physiology also regards it as very, very basic. Recent studies of touch, which science labels hapticity, likewise conclude that “Touch is the first sense to develop and a critical means of information acquisition and environmental manipulation” (Ackerman et al. 2010). All five senses – and mind itself – ride steeds of wind, called wind-horses, which themselves are sensed by the body consciousness and whose meaning is present to the energetic sensibility.⁴

Even more interesting for our purposes, this same scientific study also concludes that physical touch may create an ontological scaffold for the development of intrapersonal and interpersonal conceptual and metaphorical knowledge as well as a springboard for the application of this knowledge. In these ways we can see that, at least in a general sense, tactile cues significantly alter one’s interpretation of events and sense of self. Something as simple as holding a heavy clipboard while interviewing another person is likely to make interviewees feel that their observations are more important than those of persons with lighter clipboards. Heavy objects also made job candidates appear more important; rough objects made social interactions feel more difficult, and hard objects increased rigidity in negotiations. In these ways tactile sensations are seen to influence higher social cognitive processing in specific ways as well.

Science already sees that we move from touch to cognitive sensations. Buddhist meditators also have this experience. For example, bringing continuous attention to the body within a settled state of concentration yields in time the palpable sense that the body is nothing but a fluctuating mass of sensations. This is a visceral knowing of impermanence, of interdependence, and of the lack of a stable, independent self. This information comes directly to the energetic sensibility without an intervening conceptual latticework. The energetic sensibility is also associated with intuitive responsiveness, such as a nurse or friend knowing exactly what kind of touch to apply to a body in pain (Goleman 1995, 83). No wonder that the in-depth cultivation of meditation sometimes leads to an increase in intuitive capacities, even, according to many classic texts, of clairvoyance. All this, though profoundly related to the body sense and body intelligence, requires a more careful articulation and appreciation of what is usually referred to as “the somatic.”

Buddhist texts and Asian cultures make very clear that body, energy, and mind are all crucial to understanding, training, and optimizing the human organism. The principle of impermanence, basic to Buddhist teachings, is not only an intellectual assessment of the world but a knowing available to the entirety of the practitioner’s being. From the cultivation of mindfulness in the *Foundations of Mindfulness Sūtra* to the bestowing of consecrating initiations in tantra, practices explicitly address them-

selves to the transformation of body, speech-energy, and mind. In introducing the energetic sensibility as a central category for our reflections on contemplative texts and practices, we find that we can link it with the full spectrum of actual currents palpable in the body.

This is an exciting time in religious studies for those of us interested in contemplative matters. We are still in the business of reading texts and researching cultures, but we are reading and researching differently. We are freer than ever to see these not only as linguistic productions or as nested strictly in the epistemological nexus of European post-Enlightenment concerns. We are encouraged to take emic categories as serious and as central. Above all, we are invited to juxtapose nuanced analyses of cultural construction with what Jorge Ferrer calls in his introduction to *Participatory Turn* “the mystery.” This last, combined with postmodern and feminist emphases on embodiment and sacred immanence, also noted by Ferrer (Ferrer and Sherman 2008, 7), are particularly relevant to the material I want to bring forward here. In particular, I note his comment that

it is becoming increasingly plausible that epistemological frameworks that take into account a wider – and perhaps deeper – engagement with human faculties (not only discursive reason, but also intuition, imagination, somatic knowing, empathetic discernment, moral awareness, aesthetic sensibility, meditation and contemplation) may be critical in the assessment of many religious knowledge claims.

(Ibid., 11)

This heady brew of issues actually comes to rest and resolution in the body itself. How can this be? What do we even mean by “body”? Buddhist theories of knowing and Buddhist practices of contemplation require that we understand beings as possessing three interfusing dimensions: the physical body, the energy that fuels verbal speech and all other expression, and mind. Epistemologies that too graphically or stringently separate mind and body – as Western orientations typically have done – or that omit the energetic dimension altogether will not be able to see clearly what is occurring in Buddhist texts or practices.

Contemplatives who read texts for instructions, inspiration, or insight regarding meditation read those texts on fire with their own seeking and searching and open to an ongoing process of attunement, reading not simply the text but also their own experiences in light of it. They read not only with their minds but also with their energetic sensibilities. In order to see this more explicitly we turn briefly to a few well-known passages of Buddhist literature. What I see – and what I invite you to investigate – is that the interactive latticework of concepts relevant to the body, its energies, and the impact of these on our state of mind offers a way to extend what Ferrer calls “empathetic discernment” towards Buddhist texts, practices, and cultural context.

First, we can note that three types of sources help clarify the energetic domain in Indian- and Tibetan-based Buddhist traditions. These are (1) classic Buddhist texts, from the early Indian tradition (especially those with observations on posture, mindfulness, the *skandhas*, or elements composing the body) to the later tantric descriptions of death, rebirth, and the experiences of the four intermediate states; (2) Buddhist – in this case mainly Tibetan – medical texts, including physiological and embryological descriptions of the body and its formation; and (3) actual meditation instructions

derived from either of the above. These latter not only describe and identify energetic systems in the body; they also address them with the intention of impacting them in any of a number of ways. For example, instructions on cultivating mindfulness show how to strengthen and stabilize the energy supporting attention; instructions on compassion teach how to expand energy to include others; and instructions to meditate on specific areas of the body, or to identify with specific images, shapes, or deities, show how to undermine patterns of energy associated with one's ordinary reaction patterns.

The categories of "energy" known to the energetic sensibility and relevant to meditation are not limited to the human body. We have already seen that the category of bodily dynamism confounds common Western notions of body and mind as separate. Mind rides and is experientially indistinguishable from these dynamic currents, and the entire body is suffused by them. There is no division in the energetic sensibility and, from this perspective, none between mind and body, either.

The life-vitality (*bla*) known ubiquitously in Tibetan culture and beyond (related to the Turkish word *qut*) is found in living beings as well as in the landscape, especially in mountains and lakes. The "soul lake" or "spirit lake" of Yeshe Tsogyal, for example, is the place associated with her life-vitality, or *bla* (pronounced "la," rhymes with "ma"). This tells us something important about the world a traditional practitioner inhabits: living persons are not "set against a contrasting background," as Clifford Geertz famously put it, but participate with mountains and rivers in the overall dynamic of their shared environment. In other words, there is a readily available cultural category that bears some analogy to certain fruitional experiences of meditation.

For example, *bla* bypasses the Cartesian dualism through emphasizing an important resonance between "internal" and "external," between Yeshe Tsogyal, for example, and the lake that sprang up at her birth. This holistic dynamism is integral to, for example, the way Kālacakra practice involves transforming personal energies by synchronizing them with larger, impersonal ones that are their intimate analogues.⁵ Here the body is revealed as part of an alternative universe that gradually displaces the ordinary universe in the experience of the most advanced practitioner. Displacement comes about not through a shift in ideas or even a deepening of concentration but through an opening, refining, and actual rechanneling of the body's deepest energies. Scholars and meditators alike appreciate this best by acknowledging the felt dynamism at the heart of this entire process. The body itself does not simply symbolize but actually expresses, and also deeply knows, the very mystery the practitioner encounters. How does acknowledging this energetic component change how we know a text?

Seeing Being

Practice and human beings are both dynamic. This dynamism is referenced in many of the most essential communications about meditation. Here are a few select examples from three main areas of practice.

The *Foundations of Mindfulness Sūtra*, a classic of the early Theravāda tradition and studied also in Tibet, opens with a rhetorical question about how meditation is to be done:

1. There is the case where a monk – having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building – sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect and setting mindfulness to the fore [lit: the front of the chest]. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.⁶

Why this emphasis on posture? At least as discussed in Tibetan traditions, it is clear that posture is emphasized because of the way it impacts the movement of energies in the body. "When the body is straight, the channels are straight. When the channels are straight, the energies flow well within them. When the energies flow well, the mind riding them moves well."⁷

Taking one's seat with awareness integrates body, mind, and energy in a single move. Maintaining a straight spine facilitates the smooth movement of energy along the central corridor of the body. Being aware of subtle energetic fluctuations makes one less likely to become lost in thought, caught in concepts. The conceptual mind, skittering back and forth, remembering the past, anticipating the future, is rarely in the present.

To cultivate attention is to develop an energy stream that supports it. Such cultivation also refines the energetic sensibility, allowing ongoing awareness of the feel and impact of that increased support. Recognizing this, we see that these are instructions for sensing, shifting, and releasing energy.

Even when it is focused on the idea or agenda of the moment, the totality of one's being cannot be present in an idea as such. Only an energetic system, not a cognitive one, can hold the present fully. Is this reading too much into a simple instruction? Perhaps not, when we consider other descriptions of what the cultivation of attention feels like. In a story made famous by Patrul Rinpoche in *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Buddha counsels the musician Srona, who despairs at his inability to meditate, as follows:

"When you were a layman, you were a good *vinā*-player, weren't you?"

"Yes, I played very well."

"Did your *vinā* sound best when the strings were very slack or when they were very taut?"

"It sounded best when they were neither too taut nor too loose."

"It is the same for your mind," said the Buddha; and by practicing with that advice Srona attained his goal.

(Patrul Rinpoche 1998, 14–15)

Clearly, the cultivation of attention is not a matter of forcing your mind to do something but rather of striking the right balance between tightness and looseness – in other words, working with one's energy system. Likewise, the tenth-century female adept Majig Lapdrön, in one of the most famous instructions of the entire tradition, says: "Tighten with tightness, then loosen with looseness; the essence of the teaching is there" (see Khetsun Sangpo 1982, 40). This modification comes in large measure through a sensitivity to touch, along with allowing the natural settling that occurs as one learns to focus. But even in the ninth level of the calm state (Tb. *zhi gnas*; Skt *śamatha*), when no effort at all is required, the body is said to feel "light like cotton" and

like "warm water on a shaved head." This is evidence of a shift in the energy patterns of the body.

In the Theravāda tradition, a feeling of extreme lightness akin to physical dissolution is associated with a stage known as "little stream winner."⁸ These are indications that body is in service to one's practice (Tb. *shin sbyāngs*; Skt *praśrābhi*). Such serviceability is important in all nine levels of cultivating the calm state (the function of mindfulness as such is complete by the fourth of these levels), and the calm state itself is fully conjoined with a mental and physical serviceability (Lodrö 1992).

These too arise because of shifts in bodily energy. When mental serviceability occurs, it is because

winds or currents of energy involved in unsalutary physical states are first calmed, and leave the body through the top of the head, where a sense of bliss develops, like the touch of a hot hand after shaving the head. Immediately afterwards . . . a wind of serviceability that induces physical pliancy moves throughout the body, causing separation from unsalutary physical states of roughness and heaviness and affording an ability to use the body at will . . . [and later there arises] a physical pliancy of smoothness and lightness in which the body feels light like cotton.⁹

Let us return for a moment to the *Foundations of Mindfulness* practices and how our understanding of attention as an elemental expression of the energetic sensibility opens our understanding of what is actually occurring there. After contemplating the body, the practitioner is directed to shift the focus from body to feelings, later to mind with its spectrum of emotions, and finally to mental qualities, especially negative ones that obstruct further development. Foundations here might read as a simple list of objects to which attention will be directed, as if the point were simply to move from one to the other. Yet, given the lens of the energetic sensibility, we can see the importance of recognizing that this passage also sets in motion a developing transformation of energy and thus the capacity to remain stable in the face of increasingly challenging topics. As Ken McLeod, a highly insightful Western Buddhist teacher in the Kagyu tradition, puts it, "As you rest attention in the experience of sensory sensations, energy is transformed."¹⁰ Less distracted by thoughts and more conscious of sensations, you become aware of subtle inner currents associated with each sensation.

This and related observations get to the heart of the matter: the energy shifts associated with the development of practice. These have been largely overlooked in the Western academic study of Buddhism, partly because "energy" or "energetic sensibility" has not yet become a robust category of analysis. Attention, as we have seen, cannot be primarily a function of will or intellectual acuity or psychological development, though all of these may have their place. It arises in the domain of a delicately detected energetic sensibility.

The *Foundations'* iconic articulation of progressive stages in the cultivation of attention can be read as a narrative of growing skill in maintaining awareness of increasingly deep-seated and potentially disruptive patterns of behavior. If the wind-horse supporting attention is weaker than the distracting patterns, one is carried away by that distraction. If attention is the stronger of the two, one can observe even deeply

conflictual states without the energy of attention becoming ensnared by them. As the great twentieth-century *yogī* Nyala Padma Dudul put it:

The karmic wind is a prancing flying wild horse⁴
Ridden by the childish mind
[When] demons of immediate conceptual thoughts stir it
It runs into the plain of habituated laziness.
Pull on the bridle of mindfulness.¹¹

The term "bridle of mindfulness" conveys the energetic impact of cultivating attention. Less obviously, this cultivation involves increasingly intimate interactive communication between the energy flow, which is breath, and the energy steed carrying the mind observing breath.

This mirroring communication impacts many other energy flows within the body, including the increasingly subtle ones that arise as the supporting steed of attention itself. Attention comes into such close contact with the building blocks of identity that the reified sense of identity is viscerally challenged. Finally, attention coalesces with insight, so that one no longer senses what was until now experienced as one's material body or the usual sense of a more or less reified, independent identity. This letting go is isomorphic with the cultivation of both compassion and wisdom. Nāgārjuna says in one of the most frequently cited passages from his *Precious Garland* (verse 79):

Beings are not earth, not water,
Not fire, not wind, not space,
Not consciousness and not all of them.
What person is there other than these?

And what are these elements? In the *Eight Session Mind Training*¹² attributed to Atisha we see their identification with palpable properties of different dynamisms:

This body, now transformed into the four elements of nature, serves the welfare of living beings – earth through its nature of solidity and firmness, water through its nature of moisture and fluidity, fire through its nature of heat and burning, and wind through its nature of lightness and motility.

(Jinpa 2006, 232)

These descriptions of the elements, which in Tibetan are simply called "arisings" (*byung ba*), are retained down to the present day. In Tibetan monastic training, they are memorized in the first years of study by every child enrolled.¹³

Emphasis on a visceral dissolving of the ordinary solidity of identity is found in many practices, from the type of insight practice alluded to above to the dissolving of one's body and arising as an enlightened being composed of colored light in Tibetan-style tantric mediation litanies, known as *sādhanas*. Practitioners of these and other methods describe a sense of dissolving, of immateriality, of expansion. And these occur at every level of practice, from the most foundational to the most secret. They are not just metaphors; they are visceral responses to the complex practices, ideas, and cultural categories of human being in which persons are engaged with body, speech, and mind.

What is dissolving; according to Buddhist sensibilities, is the holding on to self. The holding dissolves because one viscerally experiences the absence of that habitually held self. We grab and hold onto this self for dear life. It is not simply the idea of self that dissolves; it is the holding, the grasping. The choice of terms in Sanskrit and Tibetan here is telling. The Tibetan term for "hold," *'dzin*, is a translation of the Sanskrit term *grāhyā*, which is cognate with the English "grab." As this dissolves, the various patterns, comprising the elemental energies involved in structuring, cohering, burning-devouring, moving, and allowing, also lose their ability to deploy the self in habitual ways.

This is how the genuine transformation of habits to which practice is directed can occur. It is supported powerfully by Buddhist discourse on how thought moves towards direct experience on the path, especially through the use of imagery. We can note that imagery impacts energy: reflecting on the fact that everything changes from one moment to the next can yield a visceral and highly articulate understanding of impermanence. Imagining that the body is composed of light maps well onto Buddhist philosophical discussions of all phenomena as illusory and also of all things as empty of true existence yet fully functional, and so on. The energetic sensibility is in fact deeply affected by words and images, and it also gives rise to words and images, as any writer or artist knows, perhaps calling it "inspiration" without even recognizing that there is both a visceral and a cognitive component. This coalescence accounts in part for the sense of zest and wholeness that comes when inspiration dawns, possibly in addition to a sense of the emptying out of some habitual pattern that until now obstructed that new vision from arising.

We opened by noting that the most fundamental Buddhist practices of refuge and the cultivation of attention involve components of dynamism. We have alluded also to the widely acknowledged importance of the energetic sensibility when it comes to the elemental energies and the steeds carrying awareness in habitual peregrination. All of this indicates the relevance of a dynamic sensibility for the basics of Buddhist thought and practice. Recognizing this, we can better appreciate that esoteric practices, wherein very subtle sensibilities are centrally featured, are actually a continuation of something embedded in the stream of Buddhist thought and practice from the very beginning, as well throughout the ancient Asian cultures in which Buddhism first emerged.

We point briefly to the esoteric significance of the energetic sensibility with one of the most widely recited expressions of refuge in the Tibetan tradition. This is Jigme Lingpa's famous prayer of refuge – itself arisen when he was in a deep and persistent visionary state – which encompasses all nine vehicles of the ancient Nyingma Buddhist tradition in Tibet. That is, it contains sutric, tantric, and Dzogchen-oriented pictures of refuge:

In three real jewels, three root Bliss Filled Ones
Channels, winds, bright orbs, this Bodhi Mind
Essence, nature, moving-love mandal
Until full Bodhi I seek refuge.¹⁴

The first line refers to the refuge common to virtually all Buddhist traditions: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Their dynamics are the energies of Awakening, Holding, and

Gathering, respectively. The Sugatas, the refuge of the outer tantras; are the Guru, Deity, and Wisdom-Woman (Guru, Deva, Dakini), whose special energies are beyond the scope of our discussion here. We move on to point briefly to the clear mention in the third line of the channels, which are the pathways for the body's subtle wind currents, as well as the winds themselves and the luminous orbs they carry. These are objects of refuge for the Inner Tantras. Jigme Lingpa could well be thinking of some pithy phrases from the *Blazing Lamp*, cited by the great Longchen Rabjam, whom Jigme Lingpa encountered in vision:

At the very core of the bodies of all being

Lies the precious immeasurable mansion of the heart center

From which come many thousands of channels.

In particular, there are four supreme channels

Riding on subtle energy, awareness dwells particularly

Within these four channels.

(Longchenpa 2007, 342)

The channels, straightened by posture from the very outset of the path, now become so significant that they and the currents flowing through them are themselves refuge. And, finally, the last line expresses the refuge of the Secret-Great Completeness. This line also introduces another important term of dynamism: the spontaneously compassionate responsiveness seen as the fruition of the practitioner's earlier cultivations of love and compassion. This aspect of awakening carries forward the core aspiration that animates the entire bodhisattva path, as expressed by Shantideva in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*: "Like the great elements such as earth and space, may I always serve as the basis of the various requisites of life for innumerable sentient beings" (Shantideva 1997, ch. 3, verse 20).¹⁵ As experienced by the energetic sensibility, attention, love, and wisdom have one essential thing in common: they are all profoundly receptive. They receive what arrives without overlaying anything onto it and without subtracting anything, either. In this they are related to Dzogchen's enlightened expression of receptivity described by Jigme Lingpa above.

Attention rests with what is and does not judge the present as better or worse than what was anticipated, than what could be, or than what was. It is not lost in past or future. Love and compassion seek only to further the happiness and reduce the suffering of others, with no other agenda. They do not compare these beings or feel more or less inclined towards some of them because of anything they do or say. They take in the situation and respond. This responsive receptivity, just like any sense of receptivity with which we are familiar in our everyday life experience, is not just an idea, though it may be supported by a whole array of ideas. At its most alive, it is a visceral relaxation and resonant responsiveness in the body. Wisdom, which is nascent in both attention and compassion, is a naked embodied presence, a delicate matrix of energies in communication with everything around it, yet which any failure of recognition can obstruct. Wisdom is not impinged upon by anything it reflects or by anything that obstructs it. Like space, it is wholly receptive and wholly inviolable. Like the inspired artist or the fully present contemplative, it receives, mirrors, and displays.

For the scholar, categories such as wind-horse, elemental energies, or life force provide a lens through which we read texts and practices, allowing us to consider how they impact, manipulate, or refine energy. For the practitioner, it becomes a habit to notice whether the mind-stead is stable or unstable, whether it is focused or open, and how it feels in the body. This means, as we have suggested, sensing and attending to the flux of phenomena in which one's body and mind directly participate. Some energy impressions arise mainly in response to stimuli coming from within; such as feelings, memories, and body sensations. Others are felt as responses to events or objects impacting one's attention from "outside." These are never completely separate. Energies of interactive connection suggest the reciprocity of giving and sending associated with transmission, blessings, and the mutually impacting flows that occur whenever two or more persons are in contact. This category also applies to the relationship between the human organism and art, including the art of spiritual practice and ritual.

The Sufi sage Rumi, who grew up on the edges of Central Asian Buddhist culture and sometimes included Buddhist figures in his writing, tells a story about Chinese artists and Greek artists, each side claiming superiority. The king urged them to settle the matter by debate. The Chinese immediately began talking, but the Greeks left without saying anything. So each group was given a room in which to work their artistry. The Chinese requested hundreds of colors. The Greeks did not. "They are not part of our work."

The Greeks each day went to their room and polished it. "They made those walls as pure and clear as an open sky." When both groups had completed their work, the king came to pass judgment. Entering the Chinese room, he was "astonished by the gorgeous color and detail." Then the Greeks pulled the curtain to reveal their work:

The Chinese figures and images shimmeringly reflected
On the clear Greek walls. They lived there,
Even more beautifully, and always
Changing in the light. . . .
They receive and reflect the images of every moment,
From here, from the stars, from the void.
They take them in
As though they were seeing
with the lighted clarity
that sees them.

(Rumi 1995, 121-3)

Such is the marvelous dynamic of sheer receptivity, expressed in attention, compassion, and wisdom.

Every practice, from the cultivation of stillness, to opening one's heart to others, to dissolving into the wisdom of unbounded wholeness, has its own way of training, opening, expanding, strengthening, or releasing some type of energy. Energies that distract from reality and the path are known as karmic energies, and those that can enter the central channel are known as the wisdom energies in a culminating phase of practice. But, as we have seen, dynamism and the energetic sensibility have been present from the beginning. Virtually every text, practice, and philosophical position is implicitly or explicitly addressing them and the way they do or do not express themselves

through hanging onto, and thereby perpetuating, the mistaken sense of self that animates the karmic energies, instead gradually refining away obstructions so that an entirely different set of energies can emerge to support an entirely different way of being: the dynamism of an awakened life.

Notes

- 1 For a particularly rich account of these three wisdoms, see Dzogchen Ponlop (2006, 34-44).
- 2 *Collected Works of Jigme Lingpa* (gsung 'bum/ 'jigs med gling pa, W7477 in Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center collection, 7:799.5. www.tbrc.org/#home).
- 3 I coined this term some years ago as a way of bringing together an important cluster of human experience having to do with "energy." I am in the process of writing several articles and a book that explore this important category more fully.
- 4 The Dalai Lama mentions the foundational nature of the tactile sense in a discussion with Paul Ekman (Ekman 2008, 42). For a detailed discussion of direct perception in the Indian and Tibetan traditions, see Klein (1998, introduction and chapter 3). For an especially succinct description of the stages of dying, see Lati Rinbochay and Hopkins (1985, 16-17).
- 5 This could be considered a Buddhist analogue to a reflection on the body that, in James Nelson's words, "is nothing less than our attempts to reflect on body experience as revelation of God" (cited in Ferrer and Sherman 2008, 13).
- 6 *Māhasattīpathāna Sutta*. Many translations are available, including that by Nyanaponika (1998) and Rāhula (1974). For ease of access, a translation by Thanissaro Bhikkhu can be found at www.zhaxizhuoma.net/DHARMA/Tripitaka/Maha-satipathanaSutta.htm.
- 7 I believe that every one of the ten or so Tibetan teachers with whom I have studied fairly closely has stated this principle in virtually identical words. I have taken some liberty with the translation. Technically the word "straight" (*drung po*) is used to describe body, channels, and winds as well as mind.
- 8 Sri Satya Narain Goenka, Bodhgaya, October 1971.
- 9 Adapted slightly from Hopkins (1996, 87). Lati Rinbochay is the oral source for description of energies departing through the practitioner's crown. The source for the statement that mental pliancy removes assumptions associated with negative mental states is Atisha's *Compendium of Evident Knowledge*, mentioned in Lodrö (1992, 191). For an extensive discussion of sources on the calm state, see *ibid.*, 182 ff. See also Zahler 2009.
- 10 Ken McLeod, What to Do when Energy Runs Wild. In *Buddhadharma*, Winter 2011.
- 11 Adapted slightly from Anyen Rinpoche (2009, 99). Tibetan not cited.
- 12 Translated by Thupten Jinpa (Jinpa 2006, 225-37).
- 13 A practitioner's sensing into his or her constituent elements is not an intellectual process, even though memorization of the appropriate lists and definitions might have preceded, and now provide add cognitive support for, this kinesthetic exploration. It is not clear to me that Tibetans themselves articulate this kind of introspective sensing, but they do seem to take it for granted, much as the energy system is taken for granted, which is partly why it is so important for Western scholars, for whom this system is not a given, to take care to articulate it.
- 14 This is my chantable English translation, matching the number of syllables in the Tibetan so it can be sung to traditional Tibetan melody, thereby including the important dynamic of sound and rhythm that has always transmitted the energy of refuge practice. For the full

text of Jigme Lingpa's foundational practices in chantable English, as well as free verse translation, see Klein (2009).

15 The translation given here is from the Tibetan. See Shantideva (1997, 35, n. 58).

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From the Five Aggregates to Phenomenal Consciousness

Towards a Cross-Cultural Cognitive Science

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Introduction

Buddhism originated and developed in an Indian cultural context that featured many first-person practices for producing and exploring states of consciousness through the systematic training of attention. In contrast, the dominant methods of investigating the mind in Western cognitive science have emphasized third-person observation of the brain and behavior. In this chapter, we explore how these two different projects might prove mutually beneficial. We lay the groundwork for a cross-cultural cognitive science by using one traditional Buddhist model of the mind – that of the five aggregates – as a lens for examining contemporary cognitive science conceptions of consciousness.

The model of consciousness and meditative transformations of consciousness that we offer in this chapter is inspired by the accounts found in the Pāli Nikāyas. For this reason and for the sake of simplicity, we make reference especially to Pāli textual sources and terminology. Nevertheless, it is important to note at the outset that these texts admit of multiple possible readings. Our reconstruction differs in certain respects from the traditional interpretation of the five aggregates in the Theravāda Buddhist commentaries on the Pāli Nikāyas. Our aim, however, is not to give an historical account of what these concepts meant at any point in the development of Buddhist thought; and we make no claim that anyone in the Buddhist tradition, early or late, actually understood this model in the way we suggest. The model of attention, consciousness, and mindfulness that we draw from the Nikāya account of the five aggregates is of interest to us because it suggests promising new directions for scientific investigations of the mind. Put another way, whatever value our model has lies not in any claim to historical authenticity but, rather, in its claim to being empirically accurate and productive of further research.

Situating Buddhist views within recent scientific debates about consciousness allows us to see how these views might be tested experimentally and thereby opens up new