RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

The Wise Heart

Jack Kornfield

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ABOUT THE BOOK

For over 2000 years, Buddhist psychology has offered invaluable insights into the nature of the heart and mind, and transformed the way many people around the world handle life's challenges. But the ancient texts on which these remarkable teachings are based can be difficult to penetrate for modern seekers. Now, drawing on his experience as a monk trained in Thailand, Burma and India, as well as his expert psychology practice, Jack Kornfield provides an accessible, definitive guide to Buddhism for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

This important new work is in the tradition of his classic works *A Path with Heart* and *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*, offering practical tools to coping with modern life and dealing with emotions such as fear, anger and shame. Kornfield also shares the illuminating stories of his students and fellow practitioners, as well as his own journey towards enlightenment, including his recovery from a violence-filled childhood.

Here is a rare treasure that will give readers greater access to the secret beauty within – and without.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JACK KORNFIELD is an internationally renowned meditation teacher and one of the leaders in introducing Buddhist practice and psychology to the West. After graduating in Asian studies from Dartmouth College, he joined the Peace Corps and later trained as a Buddhist monk in Thailand, Burma, and India. Kornfield is a co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society and he also holds a Ph.D. in clinical psychology. His books include *A Path with Heart*, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*, and *The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace*.

Also by Jack Kornfield

A PATH WITH HEART

AFTER THE ECSTASY, THE LAUNDRY

THE ART OF FORGIVENESS, LOVINGKINDNESS, AND PEACE

SEEKING THE HEART OF WISDOM (with Joseph Goldstein)

TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA

A STILL FOREST POOL (with Paul Breiter)

LIVING BUDDHIST MASTERS (Living Dharma)

STORIES OF THE SPIRIT, STORIES OF THE HEART/SOUL FOOD (with Christina Feldman)

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MEDITATION FOR BEGINNERS

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—Norman Fischer, former abbot, San Francisco Zen Center, author of *Sailing Home: Using the Wisdom of Homer's Odyssey to Navigate Life's Perils and Pitfalls*

"Through Jack Kornfield's clear teaching and wonderful storytelling, *The Wise Heart* inspires us to realize and embody the love, presence and freedom that is our very essence."
—Tara Brach, author of *Radical Acceptance*

THE WISE HEART

Buddhist Psychology
for the West

JACK KORNFIELD

RIDER
LONDON · SYDNEY · AUCKLAND · JOHANNESBURG

To Aung San Suu Kyi and the monks and nuns of Burma and to all our children: May they live with a wise heart

Buddhist teachings are not a religion, they are a science of mind.

—The Dalai Lama

INTRODUCTION

LAST YEAR I joined with Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh to co-lead a conference on mindfulness and psychotherapy at UCLA. As I stood at the podium looking over a crowd of almost two thousand people, I wondered what had drawn so many to this three-day gathering. Was it the need to take a deep breath and find a wiser way to cope with the conflict, stress, fears, and exhaustion so common in modern life? Was it the longing for a psychology that included the spiritual dimension and the highest human potential in its vision of healing? Was it a hope to find simple ways to quiet the mind and open the heart?

I found that I had to speak personally and practically, as I do in this book. These conference participants wanted the same inspiration and support as the students who come to Spirit Rock Meditation Center near San Francisco. Those who enter our light-filled meditation hall are not running away from life, but seeking a wise path through it. They each bring their personal problems and their genuine search for happiness. Often they carry a burden of concern for the world, with its continuing warfare and ever-deepening environmental problems. They wonder what will be left for their children's generation. They have heard about meditation and hope to find the joy and inner freedom that Buddhist teachings promise, along with a wiser way to care for the world.

Forty years ago, I arrived at a forest monastery in Thailand in search of my own happiness. A confused, lonely

young man with a painful family history, I had graduated from Dartmouth College in Asian studies and asked the Peace Corps to send me to a Buddhist country. Looking back, I can see that I was trying to escape not only my family pain but also the materialism and suffering—so evident in the Vietnam War—of our culture at large. Working on rural health and medical teams in the provinces along the Mekong River, I heard about a meditation master, Ajahn Chah, who welcomed Western students. I was full of ideas and hopes that Buddhist teachings would help me, maybe even lead me to become enlightened. After months of visits to Ajahn Chah's monastery, I took monk's vows. Over the next three years I was introduced to the practices of mindfulness, generosity, loving-kindness, and integrity, which are at the heart of Buddhist training. That was the beginning of a lifetime journey with Buddhist teachings.

Like Spirit Rock today, the forest monastery received a stream of visitors. Every day, Ajahn Chah would sit on a wooden bench at the edge of a clearing and greet them all: local rice farmers and devout pilgrims, seekers and soldiers, young people, government ministers from the capital, and Western students. All brought their spiritual questions and conflicts, their sorrows, fears, and aspirations. At one moment Ajahn Chah would be gently holding the head of a man whose young son had just died, at another laughing with a disillusioned shopkeeper at the arrogance of humanity. In the morning he might be teaching ethics to a semi-corrupt government official, in the afternoon offering a meditation on the nature of undying consciousness to a devout old nun.

Even among these total strangers, there was a remarkable atmosphere of safety and trust. All were held by the compassion of the master and the teachings that guided us together in the human journey of birth and death, joy and sorrow. We sat together as one human family.

Ajahn Chah and other Buddhist masters like him are practitioners of a living psychology: one of the oldest and most well-developed systems of healing and understanding on the face of the earth. This psychology makes no distinction between worldly and spiritual problems. To Ajahn Chah, anxiety, trauma, financial problems, physical difficulties, struggles with meditation, ethical dilemmas, and community conflict were all forms of suffering to be treated with the medicine of Buddhist teaching. He was able to respond to the wide range of human troubles and possibilities from his own deep meditation, and also from the vast array of skillful means passed down by his teachers. Sophisticated meditative disciplines, healing practices, cognitive and emotional trainings, conflict resolution techniques—he used them all to awaken his visitors to their own qualities of integrity, equanimity, gratitude, and forgiveness.

The wisdom Ajahn Chah embodied as a healer also exists as an ancient written tradition, first set down as a record of the Buddha's teachings and then expanded by more than a hundred generations of study, commentary, and practice. This written tradition is a great storehouse of wisdom, a profound exploration of the human mind, but it is not easily accessible to Westerners.

At this moment, a winter rainstorm is drenching my simple writer's cabin in the woods above Spirit Rock. On my desk are classic texts from many of the major historic schools of Buddhism: the Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma, the eight-thousand-verse "large version" of the Heart Sutra, with its teachings on form and emptiness, and a Tibetan text on consciousness by Longchenpa. Over time, I have learned to treasure these texts and know that they are filled with jewels of wisdom. Yet the Abhidhamma (or Abhidharma in Sanskrit), considered the masterwork of the early Theravada tradition and the ultimate compendium of Buddhist psychology, is also one of the most

impenetrable books ever written. What are we to make of passages such as, “The inseparable material phenomena constitute the pure octad; leading to the dodecad of bodily intimation and the lightness triad; all as material groups originating from consciousness”? And the Heart Sutra, revered as a sacred text of Mahayana Buddhism in India, China, and Japan, can sound like a mixture of fantastical mythology and nearly indecipherable Zen puzzles. In the same way, for most readers, analyzing the biochemistry of a lifesaving drug might be as easy as deciphering some of Longchenpa’s teachings on self-existent empty primal cognition.

What we are all seeking is the experience that underlies these texts, which is rich and deep and joyfully free. When Laura arrives at Spirit Rock with her cancer diagnosis, or Sharon, the judge, comes to learn about forgiveness, each wants the pith, the heart understanding that illuminates these words. But how to find it?

Like my teacher Ajahn Chah, I’ve tried to convey the essence of these texts as a living, immediate, and practical psychology. I have become part of a generation of Buddhist elders that includes Pema Chödrön, Sharon Salzberg, Joseph Goldstein, Thich Nhat Hanh, and others who have helped to introduce Buddhist teachings widely in the West. To do this while remaining true to our own roots, we have primarily focused on the core teachings, the essence of Buddhist wisdom that spans all traditions. Though this is a role different from that of more orthodox and scholarly Buddhists, it is central to bringing Buddhist teachings to a new culture. It has been a way of forging a non-sectarian and accessible approach to these remarkable teachings. This is what another of my teachers, Ajahn Buddhadasa, encouraged: not dividing the teachings into the schools of Theravada, Mahayana, or Vajrayana, but offering Buddhayana, the core living principles of awakening.

As a parallel to these essential Buddhist teachings, I also bring in important insights from our Western psychological tradition. My interest in Western psychology began after I returned from Asia and encountered problems that had not come up in the monastery. I had difficulties with my girlfriend, with my family, with money and livelihood, with making my way as a young man in the world. I discovered that I could not use silent meditation alone to transform my problems. There was no shortcut, no spiritual bypass that could spare me from the work of integration and day-to-day embodiment of the principles I had learned in meditation.

To complement my Buddhist practice, I entered graduate school in psychology and sought out practice and training in a variety of therapeutic approaches: Reichian, analytic, Gestalt, psychodrama, Jungian. I became part of a growing dialogue between Eastern and Western psychology as I worked with innovative colleagues in the early years of Naropa Buddhist University and Esalen Institute and at meditation centers and professional conferences around the world. Gradually, this dialogue has become more fertile, more nuanced, more open-minded. Today there is widespread interest from clinicians of every school in a more positive, spiritual, and visionary approach to mental health. Many who work within the constraints of our insurance and medical system struggle with the limitations of our medical clinical approach. There is a palpable relief when I teach the perspective of nobility, of training in compassion, of non-religious ways to transform suffering and nurture our sacred connection to life.

The recent explosion of knowledge in neuropsychology has opened this dialogue still further. We can now peer into the brain to study the same central questions explored by the Buddha so many centuries ago. Neuroscientists are reporting remarkable data when studying meditation adepts, studies that corroborate the refined analysis of human potential described by Buddhist psychology.

Because they are based on millennia of experimentation and observation, Buddhist principles and teachings are a good fit for the psychological science of the West. They are already contributing to our understanding of perception, stress, healing, emotion, psychotherapy, human potential, and consciousness itself.

I've learned through my own experience that the actual practice of psychology—both Eastern and Western—makes me more open, free, and strangely vulnerable to life. Instead of using the technical terms of the West, such as *countertransference* and *cathexis*, or the Eastern terms *adverting consciousness* and *mutable intimating phenomenon*, I find it helpful to speak of *longing, hurt, anger, loving, hope, rejection, letting go, feeling close, self-acceptance, independence*, and *inner freedom*. In place of the word *enlightenment*, which is laden with so many ideas and misunderstandings, I have used the terms *inner freedom* and *liberation* to clearly express the full range of awakenings available to us through Buddhist practice. I want the stories and awakenings of students and practitioners to help us trust our own profound capacity for kindness and wisdom. I want us to discover the power of the heart to hold all things—sorrow, loneliness, shame, desire, regret, frustration, happiness, and peace—and to find a deep trust that wherever we are and whatever we face, we can be free in their midst.

As a Western Buddhist teacher, I don't sit outside on a bench like Ajahn Chah, but I do meet with students and seekers often. I usually work with those who are attending classes or on residential retreats, where students come to meditate for periods of three days up to three months. These retreats offer daily teachings and meditation instruction, a schedule of group practice periods, and long hours of silence. Every other day, students meet individually with a teacher. These individual sessions, or interviews, are short—fifteen or twenty minutes.

When a student comes for an interview, we sit together quietly for a few moments. Then I ask them about their experience at the retreat and how they are working with it. From this, a deep conversation can unfold. Sometimes I simply try to witness their practice with compassion; at other times I offer advice. Often we enter into a present-time investigation of the student's own body and mind, as the Buddha regularly did with those who came to see him. In the course of these pages you will see more fully how I and other teachers do this work. And you will get a feeling for how we can actually apply this vast and compassionate psychology in our lives today.

If you are a clinician or mental health professional, Buddhist psychology will present you with provocative new understandings and possibilities. It may inform or transform the way you work. If you are new to Buddhist teachings and meditation has seemed foreign to you, you will learn that meditation is quite natural. Simply directing your attention in a careful, considered way is the beginning. You are doing a form of meditative contemplation as you read and consider this book. If you are someone more experienced in Buddhist practice, I hope to challenge you with entirely new ways of envisioning and practicing the path of awakening.

In approaching this dialogue, I'd like to underscore a point the Dalai Lama has made repeatedly: "Buddhist teachings are not a religion, they are a science of mind." This does not deny the fact that for many people around the world Buddhism has also come to function as a religion. Like most religions, it offers its followers a rich tradition of devotional practices, communal rituals, and sacred stories. But this is not the origin of Buddhism or its core. The Buddha was a human being, not a god, and what he offered his followers were experiential teachings and practices, a revolutionary way to understand and release suffering. From his own inner experiments, he discovered a

systematic and remarkable set of trainings to bring about happiness and fulfill the highest levels of human development. Today, it is this path of practice and liberation that draws most Western students to Buddhism.

The teachings in this book are a compelling challenge to much of Western psychology and to the materialism, cynicism, and despair found in Western culture as well. From the first pages they outline a radical and positive approach to psychology and to human life. Starting with nobility and compassion, Part I explains the Buddhist vision of mental health and consciousness. Part II details healing and awakening through the practices of mindfulness. Part III is devoted to the transformation of unhealthy emotions. Part IV outlines a broad range of Buddhist psychological tools, from the power of concentration and visualization to sophisticated cognitive trainings and transformative social practices. Part V explores the highest possibilities of development, extreme mental well-being, and liberation.

At the end of most chapters, I have suggested specific Buddhist practices for you to try. Think of these as experiments to explore with an open mind. If you don’t have time to undertake all of them, trust your intuition and begin with the practices that you feel will best serve your heart. If you give yourself to them for a period of time, you will find that they transform your perspective and your way of being in the world.

It is an urgent task for the psychology of our time to understand and foster the highest possibilities of human development. The suffering and happiness in our world, both individual and collective, depend on our consciousness. We have to find a wiser way to live. The good news is that it is eminently possible to do so. In this book I offer the visionary and universal perspectives of Buddhism for the healing of our hearts, the freeing of our minds, and the benefit of all beings.

I
WHO ARE YOU REALLY?

1

NOBILITY

OUR ORIGINAL GOODNESS

O Nobly Born, O you of glorious origins, remember your radiant true nature, the essence of mind. Trust it. Return to it. It is home.
—Tibetan Book of the Dead

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in the eyes of the Divine. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. … I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other.
—Thomas Merton

IN A LARGE temple north of Thailand's ancient capital, Sukotai, there once stood an enormous and ancient clay Buddha. Though not the most handsome or refined work of Thai Buddhist art, it had been cared for over a period of five hundred years and become revered for its sheer longevity. Violent storms, changes of government, and

invading armies had come and gone, but the Buddha endured.

At one point, however, the monks who tended the temple noticed that the statue had begun to crack and would soon be in need of repair and repainting. After a stretch of particularly hot, dry weather, one of the cracks became so wide that a curious monk took his flashlight and peered inside. What shone back at him was a flash of brilliant gold! Inside this plain old statue, the temple residents discovered one of the largest and most luminous gold images of Buddha ever created in Southeast Asia. Now uncovered, the golden Buddha draws throngs of devoted pilgrims from all over Thailand.

The monks believe that this shining work of art had been covered in plaster and clay to protect it during times of conflict and unrest. In much the same way, each of us has encountered threatening situations that lead us to cover our innate nobility. Just as the people of Sukotai had forgotten about the golden Buddha, we too have forgotten our essential nature. Much of the time we operate from the protective layer. The primary aim of Buddhist psychology is to help us see beneath this armoring and bring out our original goodness, called our Buddha nature.

This is a first principle of Buddhist psychology:

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1 See the inner nobility and beauty of all human beings.

Robert Johnson, the noted Jungian analyst, acknowledges how difficult it is for many of us to believe in our goodness. We more easily take our worst fears and thoughts to be who we are, the unacknowledged traits called our “shadow” by Jung. “Curiously,” writes Johnson, “people resist the noble aspects of their shadow more strenuously

than they hide the dark sides. … It is more disrupting to find that you have a profound nobility of character than to find out you are a bum."

Our belief in a limited and impoverished identity is such a strong habit that without it we are afraid we wouldn't know how to be. If we fully acknowledged our dignity, it could lead to radical life changes. It could ask something huge of us. And yet some part of us knows that the frightened and damaged self is not who we are. Each of us needs to find our way to be whole and free.

In my family, it was not easy to see my own goodness. My earliest memories are of a paranoid and unpredictably violent father, a bruised and frightened mother, and four boys who each wondered, "How did we get here?"We would all hold our breath when our father pulled the car into the driveway. On good days he could be attentive and humorous and we would feel relieved, but more often we had to hide or cower to avoid his hair-trigger anger and tirades. On family trips the pressure might lead him to smash my mother's head into the windshield or to punish his children for the erratic behavior of other drivers. I remember my father's grandmother pleading with my mother not to divorce him. "At least he can sometimes hold a job. He's not so crazy as those ones in the mental hospitals."

Yet I knew this unhappiness was not all there was to existence. I can remember running out of the house on painful days, at age six or seven, while my parents fought. Something in me felt I didn't belong in that house, as if I had been born into the wrong family. At times I imagined, as children do, that one day there would come a knock at the door and an elegant gentleman would ask for me by name. He would then announce that Jack and his brothers had been secretly placed in this home, but that now his real parents, the king and queen, wanted him to return to his rightful family. These childhood fantasies gave rise to one

of the strongest currents of my life, a longing to be part of something worthy and true. I was seeking my real family of noble birth.

In these often cynical times, we might think of original goodness as merely an uplifting phrase, but through its lens we discover a radically different way of seeing and being: one whose aim is to transform our world. This does not mean that we ignore the enormousness of people's sorrows or that we make ourselves foolishly vulnerable to unstable and perhaps violent individuals. Indeed, to find the dignity in others, their suffering has to be acknowledged. Among the most central of all Buddhist psychological principles are the Four Noble Truths, which begin by acknowledging the inevitable suffering in human life. This truth, too, is hard to talk about in modern culture, where people are taught to avoid discomfort at any cost, where "the pursuit of happiness" has become "the right to happiness." And yet when we are suffering it is so refreshing and helpful to have the truth of suffering acknowledged.

Buddhist teachings help us to face our individual suffering, from shame and depression to anxiety and grief. They address the collective suffering of the world and help us to work with the source of this sorrow: the forces of greed, hatred, and delusion in the human psyche. While tending to our suffering is critical, this does not eclipse our fundamental nobility.

The word *nobility* does not refer to medieval knights and courts. It derives from the Greek *gno* (as in *gnosis)*, meaning "wisdom" or "inner illumination." In English, nobility is defined as human excellence, as that which is illustrious, admirable, lofty, and distinguished, in values, conduct, and bearing. How might we intuitively connect with this quality in those around us? Just as no one can tell us how to feel love, each of us can find our own way to sense the underlying goodness in others. One way is to

shift the frame of time, imagining the person before us as a small child, still young and innocent. Once after a particularly difficult day with my teenage daughter, I found myself sitting beside her as she slept. Just hours before, we had been struggling over her plans for the evening; now she lay sleeping with the innocence and beauty of her childhood. Such innocence is there in all people, if we are willing to see it.

Or, instead of moving back in time, we can move forward. We can visualize the person at the end of his life, lying on his deathbed, vulnerable, open, with nothing to hide. Or we can simply see him as a fellow wayfarer, struggling with his burdens, wanting happiness and dignity. Beneath the fears and needs, the aggression and pain, whoever we encounter is a being who, like us, has the tremendous potential for understanding and compassion, whose goodness is there to be touched.

We can perhaps most easily admire the human spirit when it shines in the world's great moral leaders. We see an unshakable compassion in the Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, who remains steadfast and loving in spite of long years of house arrest in Burma. We remember how South African president Nelson Mandela walked out of prison with a gracious spirit of courage and dignity that was unbent by twenty-seven years of torture and hardship. But the same spirit also beams from healthy children everywhere. Their joy and natural beauty can reawaken us to our Buddha nature. They remind us that we are born with this shining spirit.

So why, in Western psychology, have we been so focused on the dark side of human nature? Even before Freud, Western psychology was based on a medical model, and it still focuses primarily on pathology. The psychiatric profession's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which orients the work of most therapists, clinics, and health care providers, is a comprehensive

listing of hundreds of psychological problems and diseases. Categorizing problems helps us study them and then, it is hoped, cure them in the most scientific and economically efficient way. But often we give so much attention to our protective layers of fear, depression, confusion, and aggression that we forget who we really are.

As a teacher, I see this all the time. When a middle-aged man named Marty came to see me after a year of painful separation and divorce, he was caught in the repetitive cycles of unworthiness and shame that he had carried since childhood. He believed there was something terribly wrong with him. He had forgotten his original goodness. When a young woman, Jan, came to Buddhist practice after a long struggle with anxiety and depression, she had a hard time letting go of her self-image as a broken and damaged person. For years she had seen herself only through her diagnosis and the various medications that had failed to control it.

As psychology becomes more pharmacologically oriented, this medical model is reinforced. Today, most of the millions of adults seeking mental health support are quickly put on medication. Even more troubling, hundreds of thousands of children are being prescribed powerful psychiatric drugs for conditions ranging from ADHD to the newly popular diagnosis of childhood bipolar disorder. While these medications may be appropriate, even lifesaving, in some cases, laypeople and professionals increasingly look for a pill as the answer to human confusion and suffering. It need not be so.

INNER FREEDOM: LIBERATION OF THE HEART

If we do not focus on human limits and pathology, what is the alternative? It is the belief that human freedom is possible under any circumstances. Buddhist teachings put

it this way: “Just as the great oceans have but one taste, the taste of salt, so do all of the teachings of Buddha have but one taste, the taste of liberation.”

Psychologist Viktor Frankl was the sole member of his family to survive the Nazi death camps. Nevertheless, in spite of this suffering, he found a path to healing. Frankl wrote, “We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

When we are lost in our worst crises and conflicts, in the deepest states of fear and confusion, our pain can seem endless. We can feel as if there is no exit, no hope. Yet some hidden wisdom longs for freedom. “If it were not possible to free the heart from entanglement in unhealthy states,” says the Buddha, “I would not teach you to do so. But just because it is possible to free the heart from entanglement in unhealthy states do I offer these teachings.”

Awakening this inner freedom of spirit is the purpose of the hundreds of Buddhist practices and trainings. Each of these practices helps us to recognize and let go of unhealthy patterns that create suffering and develop healthy patterns in their place. What is important about the Buddhist psychological approach is the emphasis on training and practice, as well as understanding. Instead of going into therapy to discuss your problems and be listened to once a week, there is a regimen of daily and ongoing trainings and disciplines to help you learn and practice healthy ways of being. These practices return us to our innate wisdom and compassion, and they direct us toward freedom.

SACRED PERCEPTION

The saints are what they are, not because their sanctity makes them admirable to others, but because the gift of sainthood makes it possible for them to admire everybody else.
—Thomas Merton

Each time we meet another human being and honor their dignity, we help those around us. Their hearts resonate with ours in exactly the same way the strings of an unplucked violin vibrate with the sounds of a violin played nearby. Western psychology has documented this phenomenon of "mood contagion" or limbic resonance. If a person filled with panic or hatred walks into a room, we feel it immediately, and unless we are very mindful, that person's negative state will begin to overtake our own. When a joyfully expressive person walks into a room, we can feel that state as well. And when we see the goodness of those before us, the dignity in them resonates with our admiration and respect.

This resonance can begin very simply. In India, when people greet one another they put their palms together and bow, saying *namaste*, "I honor the divine within you." It is a way of acknowledging your Buddha nature, who you really are. Some believe that the Western handshake evolved to demonstrate friendliness and safety, to show that we are not holding any weapon. But the greeting *namaste* goes a step further, from "I will not harm you" to "I see that which is holy in you." It creates the basis for sacred relationship.

When I began my training as a Buddhist monk, I found a taste of this sacred relationship. Around Ajahn Chah was an aura of straightforwardness, graciousness, and trust. It was the opposite of my early family life, and though it initially felt strange and unfamiliar, something in me loved it. Instead of a field of judgment, criticism, and unpredictable

violence, here was a community dedicated to treating each person with respect and dignity. It was beautiful.

In the monastery, the walking paths were swept daily, the robes and bowls of the monks were tended with care. Our vows required us to cherish life in every form. We carefully avoided stepping on ants; we valued birds and insects, snakes and mammals. We learned to value ourselves and others equally. When conflict arose, we called on practices of patience, and in seeking forgiveness we were guided by councils of elders who demonstrated how to approach our failings with mindful respect.

Whether practiced in a forest monastery or in the West, Buddhist psychology begins by deliberately cultivating respect, starting with ourselves. When we learn to rest in our own goodness, we can see the goodness more clearly in others. As our sense of respect and care is developed, it serves us well under most ordinary circumstances. It becomes invaluable in extremity.

One Buddhist practitioner tells of being part of a group taken hostage in a bank in St. Louis. She describes the initial confusion and fear that spread through the hostages. She remembers trying to quiet her own racing heart. And then she tells how she made a decision not to panic. She used her meditation and her breath to quiet her mind. Over the hours, even as she helped others in her group, she addressed her captors respectfully and expressed a genuine concern for them. She saw their desperation and their underlying needs. When she and the other hostages were later released unharmed, she gratefully believed that the care and respect they showed to their captors had made their release possible.

When we bring respect and honor to those around us, we open a channel to their own goodness. I have seen this truth in working with prisoners and gang members. When they experience someone who respects and values them, it gives them the ability to admire themselves, to accept and

acknowledge the good inside. When we see what is holy in another, whether we meet them in our family or our community, at a business meeting or in a therapy session, we transform their hearts.

The Dalai Lama embodies this sacred perception as he moves through the world, and it is one of the reasons so many people seek to be around him. Several years ago His Holiness visited San Francisco and we invited him to offer teachings at Spirit Rock Meditation Center. The Dalai Lama is the head of the Tibetan government in exile, and the State Department had assigned dozens of Secret Service agents to protect him and his entourage. Accustomed to guarding foreign leaders, princes, and kings, the Secret Service agents were surprisingly moved by the Dalai Lama's respectful attitude and friendly heart. At the end, they asked for his blessing. Then they all wanted to have a photo taken with him. Several said, "We have had the privilege of protecting political leaders, princes, and prime ministers, yet there is something different about the Dalai Lama. He treats us as if we are special."

Later, during a series of public teachings, he stayed at a San Francisco hotel famous for hosting dignitaries. Just before he departed, the Dalai Lama told the hotel management that he would like to thank the staff in person, as many as wished to meet him. So on the last morning a long line of maids and dishwashers, cooks and maintenance men, secretaries and managers made their way to the circular driveway at the hotel entrance. And before the Dalai Lama's motorcade left, he walked down the line of employees, lovingly touching each hand, vibrating the strings of each heart.

Some years ago, I heard the story of a high school history teacher who knew this same secret. On one particularly fidgety and distracted afternoon she told her class to stop all their academic work. She let her students rest while she wrote on the blackboard a list of the names

of everyone in the class. Then she asked them to copy the list. She instructed them to use the rest of the period to write beside each name one thing they liked or admired about that student. At the end of class she collected the papers.

Weeks later, on another difficult day just before winter break, the teacher again stopped the class. She handed each student a sheet with his or her name on top. On it she had pasted all twenty-six good things the other students had written about that person. They smiled and gasped in pleasure that so many beautiful qualities were noticed about them.

Three years later this teacher received a call from the mother of one of her former students. Robert had been a cut-up, but also one of her favorites. His mother sadly passed on the terrible news that Robert had been killed in the Gulf War. The teacher attended the funeral, where many of Robert's former friends and high school classmates spoke. Just as the service was ending, Robert's mother approached her. She took out a worn piece of paper, obviously folded and refolded many times, and said, "This was one of the few things in Robert's pocket when the military retrieved his body." It was the paper on which the teacher had so carefully pasted the twenty-six things his classmates had admired.

Seeing this, Robert's teacher's eyes filled with tears. As she dried her wet cheeks, another former student standing nearby opened her purse, pulled out her own carefully folded page, and confessed that she always kept it with her. A third ex-student said that his page was framed and hanging in his kitchen; another told how the page had become part of her wedding vows. The perception of goodness invited by this teacher had transformed the hearts of her students in ways she might only have dreamed about.