

Gradual Awakening: The Tibetan Buddhist Path of Becoming Fully Human

Miles Neale

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Stories abound of saints, mystics, and even ordinary people who've had sudden, spectacular awakening experiences—the “spiritual lottery winners.” But there is another path to liberation and full awakening that has for centuries held an honored place in all of Tibetan Buddhism’s lineages and schools: the “*Lam Rim*,” or “Stages of the Path to Enlightenment,” or the “Gradual Path.”

The *Lam Rim* systematically lays out three stages to awakening: “Renunciation” (self-love, or evolutionary self-care), in which compulsions, afflictive emotions, and distortions are eliminated; “Bodhicitta” (compassion, or radical altruism), in which the mind is set upon liberation and awakening for the benefit of others; and “Wisdom” (correct view, or emptiness), in which the mind achieves direct perception of the ultimate reality of emptiness and interdependence.

Neale traces the levels of increasing insight into our true nature as we learn to care for ourselves, for others, and for the world, integrating the Gradual Path’s ancient wisdom with Western psychological concepts, neuroscience, and personal stories. The result is a book that is captivating, relevant, and practical for a Western audience, while including traditional Tibetan rituals, prayers, philosophical insights, elements of liturgy, visualization practices, and meditation techniques.

Calling Western culture’s watered-down, consumer-friendly version of potent spiritual practices “McMindfulness,” the book challenges Western spiritual and cultural paradigms and the dogmatic religions that negate our personal power. It offers instead a radical, accelerated path to awakening and healing that facilitates true human maturity and invites us to put our differences aside, bridge the gaps that divide us, and together address the challenges we face. “Interdependence truly means that we either flourish or perish together,” Neale writes, advising that what is needed in these perilous times is “spirituality without dogma, and science with heart.”

KRISTINE MORRIS (September/October 2018)

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