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Introduction to Buddhism: An Explanation of the Buddhist Way of Life

Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
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The night the Buddha was conceived, his mother had dreams of white elephants, ascension, and peace. Unconsciously, she knew her pregnancy and the birth of her son would be a source of great change for humanity.

By beginning his narrative with the dream imagery and maternal expectation, the author connects the story of the Buddha (Siddhartha) with what Joseph Campbell called “the monomyth” or “the hero’s journey.” Using archetypes and language familiar to Westerners, the teacher makes Buddhist faith and practice accessible.

Born what is now Nepal, Siddhartha was a much-loved child born to royalty. Before his birth, his parents were told their child would be “an enlightened ruler whose kindness would pervade the world.” From an early age, Siddhartha understood the cycle of suffering that humans endured and wanted to find a way to help his fellow humans have better lives. He mastered all the arts and sciences, read and spoke sixty-four languages, and was skilled at martial arts and archery.

The second and third sections of the compact discs offer explanations of what it means to live as a Buddhist, as well as exercises—both introductory and advanced—for the listener. Meditation is explained clearly, concisely, and simply as a tool for developing qualities such as inner peace, love, and patience. Guided meditations on the path to enlightenment include the cycle of life—birth, aging, sickness, and death; and the temptations inherent in living—having to part with what one likes, having to encounter what one does not like, and failing to satisfy one’s desires. The advanced exercises offer the hope of working toward various perfections—giving, moral discipline, patience, effort, mental stabilization, wisdom, and ultimate truth.

Originally from Tibet, Gyatso was ordained as a monk at the age of eight and spent fifteen years studying in the great monastic universities. At the age of twenty-five, he left Tibet and spent the next eighteen years in meditative retreat in the Himalayas. In 1977 he accepted an invitation to teach in England. Within a few years, he had established his first Kadampa Meditation Center in the West and had started writing books. His meditation classes—based on his writings—have groups in more than 170 cities and thirty states in the U.S and in more than 800 cities and thirty-three countries worldwide.

This book, first published in 1992, is read here without unnecessary adornment by Michael Sington, who has recorded several of the author’s previous books, including *How to Solve Our Human Problems: The Four Noble Truths* . *Introduction to Buddhism* explains a wide range of Buddhist principles, such as karma, reincarnation, the mind, and nirvana. It offers more historical background than many other works on the topic, and provides illuminating explanations as to how to achieve one’s best self.

PAM KINGSBURY (August 18, 2009)

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