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**TIBETAN BUDDHISM:
CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO
ABUSIVE SPIRITUAL SYSTEMS**

DEPENDENT ARISING

Doctrinal Issues

- **Faith / Devotion**
- **Guru** / Guru Devotion / Root Guru
- Karma / Fate
- Emptiness / Ego / Breaking Ego/ Nihilism
- **Vajrayana / Pure View**
- “Crazy Wisdom”

“Eastern” Cultural Background

- group more important than individual
- **Among Tibetans: usually no self-hate, good self-esteem (if not pride)**
- **Corrections by peers, elders or public shaming**
- **lack of understanding of Western culture and their issues (emotional empathy, guilt, self-hate etc.)**

“Western” Cultural Background

- **low self-esteem**
- **meaningless**
- **broken families**
- **type of disorientation**
- **simplistic way of thinking (black & white)**
- **guilt**
- **consumerism / greed**
- **narcissism**
- **lack of education about Buddhism**
- **journalists’ naivety**
- **wish to belong to sth better**
- **lack of and desire for spirituality**
- **lack of awareness of one’s motivation to engage in Buddhism**
- **spiritual bypassing**
- **positive prejudice a. Buddhism**

FAITH (SKT: SHRADDHA, TIB: DAD PA)

- ▶ Faith (skt: shradda, tib: dad pa) and devotion (tib: tenpa bsten-pa) are *not* synonymous.
- ▶ QUESTION: What is faith? RESPONSE: It is a conviction, clarity, and wishing with respect to an existent that is endowed with excellent qualities and power. It has the function of acting as a support for aspiration. – Asanga’s Abhidharmasammuccaya
- ▶ One must pair the following types of faith with their respective objects:
 - (1) *faith of clarity (or inspirational faith)* has as its object excellent qualities
 - (2) *faith of conviction* has as its object existent phenomena
 - (3) *faith of wishing* has as its object phenomena that have power/potential (one sees the potential and wishes to bring it to full maturation)
- ▶ Alex Berzin: A constructive emotion that focuses on something existent and validly knowable, something with good qualities, or an actual potential, and considers it either existent or true, or considers a fact about it as true. Some translators render the term as “faith.”
- ▶ What are “Good or Excellent Qualities?” Cultures answer this differently!

DEVOTION (TIB: TENPA BSTEN-PA)

- ▶ Spiritual path in Buddhism: Cultivate qualities not yet generated, increase those already generated, reduce and overcome faults already generated and don't generate faults not yet generated.
- ▶ Alex Berzin: "The Tibetan term tenpa (bsten-pa) sums up a healthy relationship with a spiritual mentor. The usual English translation is devotion, hence the term guru-devotion. Devotion, however, carries a misleading connotation. It conjures the picture of a devoted servant or a devotee of a god or a cult. It also implies a combination of emotional fervor and mindless obedience.
Tenpa, however, is a verb that means to come close to someone in one's thoughts and actions, and to rely on the person with confidence. It does not imply, however, coming close to a charlatan or a scoundrel, or relying neurotically on someone, even if the person is competent to help us. Thus, I have translated it here as building a healthy relationship. One builds such a relationship not only with a spiritual teacher, but also with a doctor."
- ▶ For a brief overview see also: "What is Faith and Devotion in Buddhism" <https://buddhism-controversy-blog.com/2015/07/08/what-is-faith-or-devotion-in-buddhism-asangaabhidharmasammuccaya/>
- ▶ For extensive exploration see: <https://studybuddhism.com/search?q=guru+devotion>

GURU

- ▶ Alex Berzin: “The most well-known Sanskrit term for a spiritual teacher is *guru*. Although in several Western countries, the word *guru* negatively connotes the head of a cult, the term literally means someone weighty or heavy. ... The connotation, instead, as the founder of the Sakya Tsar tradition, Tsarchen, explained in *A Commentary on [Ashvaghosha's] "Fifty Stanzas [on the Guru]"*, is **that gurus are weighty with qualifications. *Gu* is short for *guna*, good qualities, and *ru* stands for *ruchi*, a collection.**
- ▶ For more see: <https://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/lam-rim/student-teacher-relationship/spiritual-teachers-and-spiritual-students/the-traditional-meaning-of-a-spiritual-teacher>

DEFINITIONS BY GESHE KELSANG GYATSO

FAITH

DEFINITION OF FAITH

The definition of **faith** is a mental factor that functions principally to eliminate non-**faith**.

Without understanding non-**faith**, we cannot understand **faith**. There are three types of non-**faith**: non-**faith** of disbelief,

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NON-FAITH

The definition of **non-faith** is a deluded mental factor that is the opposite of faith.

Non-faith makes our mind like a dry seed from which no sprouts of spiritual realizations can grow. However much we study Dharma, if we lack faith we will never gain any realizations. Therefore, to gain results from our Dharma study we must improve our faith in Dharma, and in our Teachers.

DEFINITIONS BY GESHE KELSANG GYATSO

JOYFUL PATH OF GOOD FORTUNE

places are pervaded by space, so all virtuous states of mind are pervaded by **faith**.

What is **faith**? **Faith** is a naturally virtuous mind that functions mainly to oppose the perception of faults in its observed object. There are two types of virtue, natural virtue and virtue by motivation. Natural virtue is a mind that is virtuous through its own power, without depending upon a specific motivation to make it virtuous.

There are three types of **faith**: believing **faith**, admiring **faith**, and wishing **faith**. By engaging in the following meditation, if we develop conviction that our Spiritual Guide is a Buddha, this is an example of the first type of **faith**, believing **faith**. With confidence that our Spiritual Guide is a Buddha, if we believe the Dharma that he or she teaches, this is also an example of the first type of **faith**. Believing **faith** is the firmest type of **faith** because it is based on valid reasoning that brings confidence in persons and objects that are virtuous. Such **faith** is not shaken by doubts or wrong views.

An example of admiring **faith** is the **faith** we have when, by recognizing the good qualities of our Spiritual Guide and the good qualities of the Dharma that is taught, we develop admiration for these and our mind becomes very clear and free from disturbing, negative conceptions. This **faith** is pure-hearted and it comes when we develop sincere respect and

THE ELEVEN VIRTUOUS MENTAL FACTORS

non-faith of non-admiration, and **non-faith** of not-wishing. **Non-faith** of disbelief is disbelief in any correct object in which it is necessary to believe to make spiritual progress, such as the objects explained in Dharma teachings. If someone correctly explains Buddha's teachings on actions and their effects and we do not believe what they are saying, this is because the mental factor **non-faith** of disbelief is present in our mind. **Non-faith** of non-admiration is a mental factor that causes us to see faults in virtuous objects such as Dharma Teachers, the Three Jewels, and other holy beings. It makes our mind unclear and confused. **Non-faith** of not-wishing is a mind that does not desire virtuous attainments. It prevents us from developing a wish to engage in the paths to liberation or enlightenment.

These three types of **non-faith** are very harmful. Disbelief prevents us from engaging in spiritual practices and attaining Dharma realizations. It is harmful even for those who are not interested in Dharma. For example, there are many diseases that doctors call cancer but which are in fact caused by spirits or by previous karma. Although these cannot be cured by ordinary medical practices, they can be cured by the healing rituals and purification practices taught by Buddha. However, for these methods to be effective

IMPORTANT BACKGROUND ISSUE: THE QUALITIES OF A STUDENT

DEFINING QUALITIES OF A MAHAYANA STUDENT

- ▶ Aryadeva states in his Four Hundred Stanzas (Catuh-sataka): “It is said that one who is **non-partisan**, **intelligent**, and **diligent** is a vessel for listening to the teachings. The good qualities of the instructor do not appear otherwise Nor do those of fellow listeners.”
- ▶ Tsongkhapa comments: “Aryadeva says that one who is endowed with the three qualities is suitable to listen to the teachings. ... It is stated in Candrakirti’s commentary that if you, the listener, do not have all these defining characteristics of a suitable recipient of the teachings, then the influence of your own faults will cause even an extremely pure teacher who instructs you in the teachings to appear to have faults. Furthermore, you will consider the faults of the one who explains the teachings to be good qualities.”
- ▶ With respect to these three characteristics, “**nonpartisan**” means **not to take sides**. If you are partisan, you will be obstructed by your bias and will not recognize good qualities. Because of this, you will not discover the meaning of good teachings. “**Taking sides**” is to have attachment for your own religious system and hostility toward others’. **Look for it in your own mind and then discard it...**
- ▶ Though non-partisan, if you do not have the mental force **to distinguish between correct paths of good explanation and counterfeit paths of false explanation**, you are not fit to listen to the teachings. Therefore, **you must have the intelligence that understands both of these**. By this account you will give up what is unproductive, and then adopt what is productive...
- ▶ For more see: Lam Rim Chen Mo, p 75ff, Snow Lion Publications

DALAI LAMA

- ▶ “It is not healthy, of course, for disciples to deny serious ethical flaws in their guru, if they are in fact true, or his or her involvement in Buddhist power-politics, if this is the case. To do so would be a total loss of discriminating awareness.”

– *from HH Dalai Lama & Alex Berzin; The Gelug/Kagyu Tradition of Mahamudra; pp 209-210, 1987*

“CRAZY WISDOM”

- ▶ Marpa said to Mila in his parting advice:

“To impose trials on a disciple, as Tilopa did on Naropa, or as I did on you, will be profitless for undeveloped minds.”

*– from “The life of Milarepa” transl. by Lobsang Lhalungpa
Granada Books (1979 edition), p.91*