STAGES ON THE SPIRITUAL PATH:
A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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If the focus of transpersonal therapy is to facilitate natural impulses of growth toward transpersonal realization (Sutich, 1975), then what are the stages a person might go through on such a spiritual path? Since the following suggestions are drawn from my experience as a student of Tarthang Tulku, Rinpoche, and from my reading of Buddhist literature, I have entitled this paper "a Buddhist perspective," or, perhaps more precisely, "the perspective of one practitioner and student of Buddhism."

The vast literature of Buddhism includes many different discussions of stages, paths and spiritual levels. One of the best known is the "Five Paths" described in The Jewel Ornament of Liberation (Guenther, 1959). When the many Tibetan texts on the Five Paths are translated into English, these Five Paths (which, using the terminology of Western developmental psychology, would be called "five stages") will offer psycho-spiritual travelers a detailed map of growth, from the beginning stage to Buddhahood. They describe in detail the various components, characteristics, and necessary conditions for spiritual progress into higher stages. In abbreviated form, these five stages are:

1. **Preparatory beginning**. Getting ready. This assumes an adequate foundation in worldly knowledge, including ethics and manners (tshogs-lam).

2. **Linkage to the goal**. Beginning to have the goal clearly in view. Intensified interest in one’s spiritual development (sbyor-lamy).

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3. **Seeingness.** A clearer view of the goal and the Path. Absence of doubts. Recognition of the Four Noble Truths. Intensified practice, working toward the goal (mthong-lam).

4. **Concentrated practice.** Staying within meditative awareness. One is now strong enough to overcome obstacles, and progress occurs on its own momentum (sgom-lam).

5. **Fulfillment in Buddhahood.** Enlightenment (mi-slob-lam).

The following quotation, from the Introduction to the translation of a Tibetan text, *Mind in Buddhist Psychology*, further illustrates the character of the five Buddhist stages or phases in their context as Buddhist approaches to developmental psychology.

The title of this book *Mind in Buddhist Psychology* poses two related questions: Is it justifiable to speak of Buddhist psychology? and, if so, What is the nature of mind in such a framework? The first question can be answered easily in the affirmative since, in many respects, Buddhist ideas are close to contemporary currents in Western psychology which have moved far away from earlier postulational suppositions. Secondly, throughout its history, Buddhism has emphasized experiential knowledge rather than dogmas as the starting point of man's growth and has been less concerned with systems of concepts and sets of postulates which remain hypotheses to be tested. Consequently, Buddhist psychological methods of observation are concerned with a study of human potentialities as they now exist, as well as how to develop them in the future.

*The Way*

*The Way* (lam) is a short term for the fact that man controls his future because of his ability to perceive, to know, and to order what he perceives and knows. This ability is dynamically active at this and every other moment, for the mind cannot be a static entity or a mere state or function of consciousness. Rather, it involves questions of When? Where? Under what conditions? From which perspectives? and hence, the mind is an on-going process in a person's life history.

In other words, the central problem of Buddhist psychology is that of personality, which is understood as implying that man has to be true to his inner nature in whichever way it may be defined-after, and not before, integrative techniques have been applied. Such a conception has immediate bearings on the individual's responsi-

*These are the Four Noble Truths: the existence of suffering, that suffering is produced by certain causes, that the cessation of suffering is possible, and that there is a Path or Way to end suffering. See Guenther, 1972, pp. 45, 57, 60, 82, 85.*
bilities which are inextricably tied up with the dimension of tser­iousness of living' as contrasted with the shallowness and superfi­ciality of behavioristic oversimplifications and silly reductions.

The 'way', as understood in Buddhism, is a continual unfolding of man's potential and passes through several stages or phases, each of them involving different references and different self-images. The 'way' begins with the 'accumulation' of all that is necessary for man's intellectual and spiritual growth (tshogs-lam), and then merges into the 'linkage' of what has been learned with further growth (sbyor-lam) which, as it were, results in a new vision or fresh perspective, enabling the beholder to see more easily the intrinsic nature of the universe and of himself (mthong-lam). But this vision has to be kept alive. This is effected by the Subsequent phase (sgom-lam), which is a 'live experience', and climaxes in the 'no-more-learning' phase (mi-slob-lam). At this point, the individual cannot but perceive the world around him as-it-is intrinsi­cally, as well as perceive all that constitutes this world as being harmoniously interrelated. Contemplative understanding is never a thoughtless and senseless absorption in an imaginary absolute, but is always active in the special sense of not interfering. Man's actions and his very life become more meaningful once this phase has become operative. Furthermore, the 'way' involves the whole personality which is as much body as it is feelings, the mind and man's set of values and interpretations. The Buddhist 'way' is thus most comprehensive in being a growth and health psychology. [Guenther & Kawamura, 1975]

This quotation illustrates that Buddhism offers a comprehensive developmental psychology for meta-normal adults and, in addition, shows that the path toward transpersonal' development is not necessarily "psychic," "mystical" or qualitatively different-except in openness and far-reachingness-from how human cognition perceives any referent. Similar to the five "object-determining mental events" (Guenther & Kawamura, 1975, pp. 29-37), one approaches Enlightenment beginning with a normal cognitive foundation, moving from interest to intensified interest, on to inspection, then to intense concentration until, finally, in appreciative discrimination, the referent-in this case, ourselves in dynamic totality with our world-is brought to life with certainty and understanding. As regards Enlightenment on the Buddhist Path, the referent is both objective and subjective and involves our whole Being, as well as our knowing. It is both inner and outer.

While drawing inspiration from the traditional Buddhist discussion of the Five Stages on the Path, the following discussion

'This term was preceded by Maslow's term, "meta-normal," but as the word "normal" and what it refers to has become confused, so has the term "meta­normal." Another closely related term is "spiritual," a necessary term even though it has often been misused.
FIGURE 1
A FIVE-STAGE THEORY OF THE SPIRITUAL PATH

I: Peak Experiences:
Aspiration for Enlightenment

III: Community, Compassion,
    Strength

IV: Deep Psychological Awareness:
    Spirituality as Tantra

V: Fulfillment, Enlightenment,
    Union with the Lineage of
    Original Teachers

is not an exact parallel, except in the sense that the highest stage is Buddhahood, which requires all the other stages as preliminaries and is their fulfillment. Figure 1 describes a five-stage theory, from the beginning to the fulfillment, and indicates visually the progressive unfolding of the five stages as increasingly inclusive, with higher stages building upon and transcending lower stages.

STAGE I: BEGINNING WITH CHILDHOOD PRECURSORS
    AS THE FOUNDATION

Buddhism assumes an adequate foundation in worldly knowledge, including language, logic, ethics, manners, and the ex-
experience of a wide variety of emotional and mental stages. It benefits from an understanding of art and science. Many of the "stages" receiving so much emphasis in Western developmental psychology, such as Piaget & Inhelder's (1958) highest stage of formal cognition and Erikson's (1958) first four stages of Trust, Autonomy, Initiative, and Industry, would be taken for granted by Buddhism as the foundation on which to begin building adult spiritual development. Most Americans do not grow up as Buddhists. They enter the Buddhist Path, if at all, after childhood, after their constitutional cognitive capacity has combined with various individual and social learning processes. Therefore, it should be remembered that when Buddhism appeals to non-verbal, open awareness, it is as an antidote to overly formal cognition, ethics, and manners. For example, it is ridiculous, given the rigor of Buddhist psychology and philosophy, to consider Buddhist meditation as anti-intellectual. It is meta- and post-intellectual. The mystical cognition of advanced stages of Buddhist development includes all the childhood precursors, including formal cognition, in a larger context.

According to Buddhism, the typical adult fixates at the level of childhood precursors. As life-experience accumulates, we are lost in a fragmented and narrow world of socially defined roles, opinions, biases, specializations, and bits and pieces of knowledge. Often feeling like a victim of external forces, we are led compulsively about by our self-image (Tarthang Tulku, 1974) which, in its narrowness, cuts us off from our liberating cognitive capacity. This self-image provides an ersatz sense of uniqueness and freedom, while simultaneously forcing us to function at a restricted, enslaved level.

If we are alert and perceptive to our process of development, we recognize that, as our life-experience accumulates, a change needs to be made in our overall "organization" of ourselves. The childhood precursors such as formal cognition fail to sustain an adequate functional equilibrium. Unable to assimilate the full range and richness of inner and outer experience, our minds become confused and dissatisfied. Just as arithmetic, while a useful foundation, points beyond itself to higher mathematics, so our childhood precursors point beyond themselves to a higher stage of experience and truth. Buddhism is not opposed to formal cognition and culturally conditioned cognition; though it warns that these are not capable of providing us with spiritual fulfillment, it nonetheless makes

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1 For background data on members of the Tibetan Nyingma Meditation Center in Berkeley, see A survey of center students, Crystal Mirror, 1974, 3, 129-133.
them a qualifying characteristic of the spiritual novice. Being the best that worldly knowledge can offer, they serve as the foundation of spiritual development.

STAGE II: PEAK EXPERIENCES AND ASPIRATION FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

The second stage emerges when the functional equilibrium built around formal cognition, social roles and other childhood precursors gives way to a more inclusive equilibrium built around peak experiences (Maslow, 1964) and the aspiration for Enlightenment.

The Buddhist Path becomes formulated in this stage as a clear personal goal, beginning when mystical and peak experiences break through the narrow self-image, and culminating when we have a strong, clear aspiration for Enlightenment. This stage is a process of interiorizing ourselves through intense experiences such as peace, insight, relaxation, beauty, ecstasy, confidence, friendship, grief, meaningfulness. While sexual and drug-related experiences could, and do, serve as peak experiences, Buddhism has viewed these two areas with skepticism because they tend to create a dependency on, or even an addiction to, an external physical stimulus and, in searching for such obvious, seemingly dependable, gross physical experiences we may have difficulty appreciating the more subtle but ultimately more satisfying meditative states. While some higher Tantric practices utilize sexual symbolism, it is not meant to be taken literally, nor is it meant for beginners. In Buddhism, the preferred peak experiences are meditative, occurring most favorably in vast, beautiful, peaceful natural settings near the oceans and mountains, under the guidance of an authoritative spiritual teacher, and in the context of Enlightenment as a goal. In Buddhism these peak experiences are not trance-like states or mental gymnastics, but highly conscious, aware moments closely connected with confidence and insight, where we observe ourselves and the world both sensitively and integratively, breathe more deeply, and feel a sense of oneness in all directions (Lindgren, 1973; Luce, 1973). Such meditation provides the most excellent peak experiences because it neither fixates nor addicts us, but refines itself naturally from momentary excitements toward more lasting bliss, from erotic feelings toward empathy, from emotionality toward understanding, from dependency toward self-sufficient strength and generosity. Meditation in a Buddhist context is not just an isolated technique, but a natural, organic process for refining one's "Buddha-nature" toward Enlightenment.
Meditation transmutes itself from peak to plateau experience with the help of what is often caned "philosophy" - an analysis of all reality and of how the human mind knows this reality. To practitioners and teachers in the Buddhist tradition, it has seemed obvious that meditation cannot be compartmentalized. There can be no artificial boundaries between "psychology" and all the rest of so-called "reality." The deeper our experiencing, the more we recognize everywhere the Four Marks of Conditioned Existence: composite complexity, relative transiency, various degrees of suffering and unsatisfactoriness, and insubstantiality (Tarthang Tulku, 1973). Under proper guidance, peak experiences emerge as these four therapeutic, though painful, recognitions which are conducive to Enlightenment. Without proper guidance, the very intensity, ecstasy and beauty of peak experiences can produce bewilderment and dissatisfaction when these most treasured qualities prove to be conditioned and transient.

The aspiration for Enlightenment is not just an idea. It is itself an intense experience, similar to what Maslow (1972b) calls a plateau experience, an aspiration for a continuing, pervasive extension of the qualities felt in peak moments into all of our life-space and life-time. Peak experiences, by definition, are more ephemeral, while a plateau experience is more stable. Aspiration for Enlightenment includes the experience of relaxation. It is not an anxious striving toward some far-off goal. The process of being on the Path is intrinsically rewarding at each stage, and naturally extends into the highest plateau experience of Buddhahood. Because it is a relaxed, natural, and intrinsically rewarding plateau experience, the aspiration for Enlightenment, while intentional in orientation, is quite different from the compulsive desire or "craving" which Buddhism specifies as the cause of suffering.

STAGE III: COMMUNITY, COMPASSION AND STRENGTH

The third stage emerges when one graduates from seeking a wide variety of peak experiences primarily for oneself, joins a specific Buddhist spiritual community, and follows a specific teacher. It is difficult to traverse this stage while being an eclectic, "shopping around" for transpersonal therapists and spiritual teachers. In the Buddhist tradition, one follows a specific Buddhist teacher as part of a community in the process of learning discipline and compassion. Buddhist teachings emphasize the need for adequate experience and thought before committing oneself to the Path and to membership in the
Sangha, the community of those on the Path. Full membership in the Sangha comes after the childhood precursors have been transcended into many peak experiences until the aspiration for Enlightenment has stabilized. These prerequisites protect the Buddhist practitioner from the over-conformity and fanaticism more characteristic of proselytizing spiritual groups who seek rapid adherence to the community. The diversity and creativity apparent among practitioners in Tibet was an outgrowth of an approach which builds loyalty and discipline only upon an adequate foundation of experience and understanding.

Buddhism teaches that the six great strengths to be developed are generosity, morality, vigor, patience, meditative awareness and wisdom. These "six perfections" increasingly replace our weakness, confusion, impulsiveness and selfishness with more universal, cognitive qualities and make us capable of assimilating a vast range of inner and outer experience. These six virtues are not self-styled because, as members of the Sangha, practitioners are tested in daily interaction with others who are on the Path and taught by an authentic spiritual teacher. It is in this way that what looks to an outsider as discipline imposed by the community and the leader, is, in the Buddhist tradition, part of a natural growth process by which each person's varied capacities emerge.

Stage III comes after Stage II because peak experiences and aspirations provide a motivating spirit which infuses the learning of community, compassion and strength. This stage precedes Stage IV because community, compassion and strength provide nurturance and protection to the individual as he enters ocean-like psychological and spiritual depths. Only when he has learned to have compassion for, and to take care of himself and others can he trust himself to travel safely through the deepest psychological exercises of Buddhism. Many practitioners, reading about esoteric exercises from books but lacking proper guidance and preparation, mistakenly undertake so-called Tantric explorations which are simply self-induced fantasies and physical sensations which have little to do with the genuine Dharma.

STAGE IV: DEEP PSYCHOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND SPIRITUALITY AS TANTRA

Stage IV begins when, as in Stage II, the practitioner's focus turns intensively inward. This time, however, he is not seeking satisfying peak experiences but only the raw truth, be it pleas-

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1 For a lucid description of the Six Perfections, see Calm and clear, 1973, pp. 29-33, and The jewel ornament of liberation (Guenther, 1970).
In this stage he is able to fully integrate Buddhist philosophy with his personal experience. As he experiences the Four Noble Truths, the Six Perfections, and the Four Marks of Conditioned Existence within himself, his progress takes on a momentum of its own, and his spiritual development becomes a powerful, self-unfolding process. While learning and development continues, it is now not so much by conscious effort as it was earlier on the Path. Further learning occurs akin to the way in which a fire, once started, spreads naturally.

Buddhist philosophy emphasizes that a deepening psychological awareness occurs as we learn to see the phenomenal world as apparition. This Buddhist concept of apparition is often misunderstood as a denial of the relative constancy and independence of objects. The truth of apparitionalness in no way denies empirical regularities which are subject, for example, to scientific observation. Piaget & Inhelder (1958) have described in detail how the child increasingly recognizes patterns. He sees stabilities and repetitions in encounters with his world and observes increasingly complex causal interrelationships and indirect methods of problem solving and creativity. He sees larger, broader pictures, and he is able to foresee long-term future results. To realize, in the Buddhist sense, all phenomena as apparitional is not some regression to naive unawareness; it is rather to keep formal cognition from hypertrophying and reifying itself. It is to realize, in the ultimate sense, that phenomena are perceived, and that accurate, meaningful perceptions and responses depend on keeping alive the intrinsic awareness which enables perception of regularities and patterning. If one neglects this intrinsic awareness, he loses his wholeness as a person and his ability to continue seeing reality as it is. The loss of intrinsic awareness occurs when one forgets that all so-called phenomena are, psychologically speaking, perceptions of relative concreteness and permanence, and when one confuses his labels for phenomena with the phenomena themselves. The loss of intrinsic awareness (ma-rig-pa), traditionally translated as “ignorance,” is the first link in the twelve-fold chain of causation. The loss of intrinsic awareness lets one fall into a craving nature, with
all the feelings of separation and attachment, which produces the suffering inherent in the various manifestations of Samsaric existence.

Another aspect of integrating Buddhist philosophy with personal experience is learning to recognize experientially the fifty-one mental events described in the Buddhist Abhidharma iGesar, pp. 7-10). The translation of the Tibetan terms for the fifty-one mental events is difficult, especially into single-word equivalents. Mind in Buddhist Psychology (Guenther & Kawamura, 1975) offers these translations and then explains each in detail:

A. The five ever-present mental events: Feeling-tone, conceptualization, directionality of Mind, rapport, egocentric demanding.

B. The five object-determining events which specify objects: Interest, intensified interest which stays with its object, inspection, intense concentration, appreciative discrimination.

C. The eleven positive mental events: Confidence-trust, self-respect, decorum, non-attachment, non-hatred, non-deludedness, diligence, alertness, concern, equanimity, and non-violence.

D. The six basic emotions which color perceptions and create unrest in the mind: Cupidity-attachment, anger, arrogance, lack of intrinsic awareness, indecision, and opinionatedness.

E. The twenty proximate factors of instability which are associated with the basic emotions: Indignation, resentment, slyness-concealment, spite, jealousy, avarice, deceit, dishonesty, mental inflation, malice, shamelessness, lack of sense of propriety, gloominess, ebullience, lack of trust, laziness, unconcern, forgetfulness, inattentiveness, desultoriness.

F. The four variables which can be positively or negatively charged (and if timely and appropriate, can be the occasion for progress on the path): Sluggishness or drowsiness, worry, selectiveness, discursiveness.

The Abhidharma is a vast subject. It is a road map of consciousness by which the practitioner of meditation learns the structure and function of mind. The Samadhirajasutra states:

I have explained the teaching which is excellent,
in every respect, but
If you, from studying it, do not put it into practice,
It, like a great medicine for disease held only in one’s hand,
Will not be able to nourish one back to health.

|Guenther & Kawamura, 1975, p. 109|

In the Buddhist tradition, these mental events are understood as one comes to the painful yet liberating recognition of ten-
Beyond the Abhidharma (an investigation common to all Buddhists), Tibetan psychology is unique in emphasizing the importance of contact with nine major types of consciousness, especially the two deepest, most homogeneous types, kun-gzhi and kun-gzhi nom-shes, which are "below" the five sensory cognitions (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching), meditation and self-image (Guenther, 1972, p. 221). Kun-gzhi, the deepest, accounts for the continuity and homogeneity of Mind (Gruber, 1974).

Contacting kun-gzhi arises out of experience in lengthy, relaxed meditation under the guidance of a skilled teacher. This contact is a deeply therapeutic process. Western psychotherapists who have undertaken appropriate Buddhist practices report that contact with kun-gzhi is deeply therapeutic (Luce, 1974). As one contacts kun-gzhi and makes it less dark and heavy, a sense of lightness and apparitionalness pervades cognition. The Tibetan Buddhist theory of kun-gzhi helps to explain the nature and function of deep meditation as a therapeutic and growth method. The theory of kun-gzhi may be useful to Western psychology, which, until recently, tended to view the person from the outside and is only now beginning to explore states of consciousness. Though vaguely comparable to the Western idea of the subconscious in terms of depth, kun-gzhi is knowable and transformable. It is a very
pure experience beyond words, an experience of relatively pure cognitive energy as a wide open field of potentiality. In Tibetan Nyingma psychology, *kun-gzhi* is viewed as the whole basis, the all-ground, from which all specific aspects emerge as subdivisions and distinct cognitive events in the ordinary mind. Contact with *kun-gzhi* is deeply peaceful, satisfying, unifying and relaxing, since it is the mind's contact with its own homogeneity and continuity.

Although contact with *kun-gzhi* is satisfying and positive, Tarthang Tulku, Rinpoche, counsels as to the dangers of becoming stuck in *kun-gzhi*, since *kun-gzhi* is not the ultimate in spiritual development. Many practitioners have made the mistake of stopping at *kun-gzhi*, but the enlightened practitioner goes beyond *kun-gzhi* to *ye-shes* (Skt., *jiicma*) which is actual, absolute, total knowingness.'

As Stage IV progresses, deep psychological awareness emerges as an experience which is trans-personal and trans-psychological. It is not only self-understanding, but understanding in a broader sense. *Ye-shes* includes the functional capacity to discern the ultimate and live within the felt presence of the ultimate. Unlike the West, Tibetan Buddhism did not develop a split between secular psychology and religious experience. Analytic-therapeutic-psychology, such as the Abhidharma and the nine types of consciousness, were integrated into the development of worship and spiritual awareness. This spirituality is honest, alive and enriched because it unfolds on the foundation of psychological awareness. Because of this, well-developed forms of worship in spirituality, such as Tantra, are quite different from religiosity or pietism. This spirituality is a pure, non-dogmatic experiencing which does not reify the objects and symbols of worship, but moves our entire being progressively into union with the genuine Absolute. The theory and practice of spirituality in Tantric Buddhism is described in detail in the latter section of *Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice* (Guenther, 1972). In not reifying its objects and symbols of worship, Tantric Buddhism does not posit any Supreme Being as an entity. The visualizations, chanting, and community worship ceremonies are all built on a strongly psychological and philosophical approach to the development of a heightened awareness of the Absolute. As the fullest expression of awareness, spirituality is a conviction which combines openness and a full use of one's cognitive capacities with as-

'These observations were made by Tarthang Tulku, Rinpoche, during the Summer 1973 Human Development Training Program, an eight-week intensive seminar for professionals in the helping professions at the Nyingma Institute in Berkeley.
preparation for death

beyond psychological awareness and spirituality

surance, certainty and peace. It includes formal cognition in a wider, more mystical cognition.

While differing from pietism and religiosity, spirituality as Tantra also differs strikingly from secularism, physicalism and rationalism, since it draws, much more than these, upon the human capacity for wonder, integration, appreciation and worship.

An important part of this spirituality is preparation for death, but in Buddhism this preparation is accomplished without getting caught up in various speculations about the continuation of some spiritual entity, soul, or separate ego. In spirituality as Tantra, one learns to fully accept the transience and insubstantiality of all phenomena, including oneself. According to the tenth-century Tibetan visionary, Long-chen-pa, this acceptance becomes the basis for joy and freedom.

Since Mind-as-such, pure from the beginning and with no root to hold to something other than itself, has nothing to do with an agent or something to be done, one's mind may well be happy... Since everything is but an apparition, perfect in being what it is, having nothing to do with good or bad, acceptance or rejection, one may well burst out in laughter."

The Natural Freedom of Mind [Guenther, 1975]

STAGE V: BUDDHAHOOD AS UNION WITH THE LINEAGE OF ORIGINAL BUDDHIST TEACHERS

Stage V, Buddhahood, occurs rarely and is impossible to describe fully, since it is by nature an inner, secret reality. In the Tibetan tradition, it is the living lineage of Bodhisattvas and Tulkus. It happens in those who have gone beyond psychological awareness and spirituality to become the fulfillment of the Buddhist Path and of human potentiality.

These exemplars of meta-normal development show a high overlap with the Being Values described by Maslow (1972&), especially aliveness, wholeness, generosity, beauty, effortless energy and dichotomy transcendence. These transpersonal adults, like Being Value Leaders, are anything but quiescent, pale saints. As embodiments of Enlightenment, they transcend the false dichotomies of freedom and spontaneity vs. order, appropriateness, or discipline; mysticism vs. practical affairs and social organization; meditation vs. philosophical analysis; art vs. science. These exemplars also exhibit Erikson's (1958) stages of Generativity and Integrity in their compassionate
enactment and spiritual wisdom. Generally, these spiritual teachers refrain from objectified answers. They most often invite others to also walk the Path.

Although I showed you the means of liberation, you must know that it depends on you alone.

Shakyarnuni Buddha

Through their teaching and their presence, they pass on to others the blessing of the lineage of Original Teachers. The inner mandala by which they live their lives is unusually universal and timeless, and seems to include all sentient beings past, present and future. These teachers ask us to undertake our own task of self-liberation as "growing up in adulthood."

Buddhahood, the highest stage of adulthood, is the fulfillment of all lower stages including spirituality, for Buddhahood demonstrates that the ultimate in spirituality is not external revelation or spiritual myths and symbols, but a fully lived spiritual life. Whatever one's stage on the Path, it is the direct contact with this embodied spiritual lineage that provides one with the fullest vision of the potentiality for growing up in adulthood, which is the revealed actuality of Buddha-nature in each one of us.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The five stages outlined above are somewhat tentative and subject to further verification. More sophisticated and verified stage theories need to be developed which are appropriate to a Western setting and which employ, in a more scholarly fashion, the extensive Buddhist literature describing stages on the Path.

Such stages may be used by students of developmental psychology, psychotherapists, transpersonal therapists, and individual practitioners. Persons may be helped to understand where they are, how they can move forward, what is too fast or too slow a pace, and which are the major obstacles and opportunities. An accurate view of stages may help discourage unnecessary fixation at lower stages or pretentious fantasies about being in a higher stage when this is not supported by reality.

However important the Buddhist analysis of various stages on the spiritual path, Buddhism reminds us that even the most
accurate spiritual stages need not be absolutized. They, too, are simply appearances and thought processes, and point beyond themselves.

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