



The Meaning of Life from a Buddhist Perspective

Dalai Lama XIV , Jeffrey Hopkins

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The Dalai Lama explains the spiritual path based on the famous Buddhist image of the Wheel of Life.

The Meaning of Life from a Buddhist Perspective Details

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Author : Dalai Lama XIV , Jeffrey Hopkins

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From Reader Review The Meaning of Life from a Buddhist Perspective for online ebook

Nate says

This book describes the 12 stages of dependent-arising through life as depicted by the complex image that appears on the back of the book (unfortunately I forget the name). The Dalai Lama also describes how each of these stages resolve not only through life but how tantra, yoga, and the process of meditation/Buddhist practice will affect your journey in cyclic existence. While explaining cyclic existence and how it applies to [your] life could be read as "The Meaning of Life", those looking for a Viktor Frankl type explanation should look elsewhere. The density of this material makes its accessibility suspect.

Lizzie says

I, too, was expecting another book than the one I got and had to recalibrate my expectations based on the book I actually bought vs. the book I thought I was buying. This is an insightful, semi-digestible (though not nearly as accessible as the Dalai Lama's other writings and transcribed lectures). As a spectator of Buddhism, but not a participant, I appreciated the detail of the proposed process of reincarnation and it is sprinkled with Dalai Lama-sized truth bombs throughout. I tend to think this would be a more appropriate read for someone who is already practicing Buddhism and who is looking for more of an advanced, nuanced look at the Buddhist Wheel of Life. But as someone simply curious about religious practices, it was still a worthwhile read and didn't take too long to finish, despite the weightiness of its content.

Billie Pritchett says

Dalai Lama's *Meaning of Life*... has some good merits. He describes some of the major Buddhist artworks that illustrate the cosmology and metaphysics of Buddhism; I'd like to get my hands on some of these prints. I also enjoyed how practical some of the teachings could be. For instance, the Dalai Lama recommends that we can learn most about ourselves in how we handle adversity. The drawbacks to the work are the particulars of Buddhist doctrine. If you're into learning the ins-and-outs of the dogma, this might suit you, but for my own taste I wasn't as interested in the specifics of Tibetan Buddhism in this work as I was in the practical advice. I'll read another book to get to know more about Tibetan Buddhism.

Sarah says

This book is a little dense for a reader who is unfamiliar with the basic tenets of buddhism. It describes the 12 stages of dependent arising through life and the buddhist tenets of reincarnation. For non-buddhist readers, it does not give much advice on the meaning of life - except seeking to become compassionate to all living beings. There are some issues with the translation of this book, which may make the subject matter seem denser than it really is.

Mary says

Very good, nice explanations of some of the truths and other Buddhist teaching. My fave part is: "Because sentient beings are of many and various dispositions and interests, Buddha set forth many different levels of practice. Recognizing this is helpful not only in gaining a proper perspective on Buddhist teachings but also in developing respect from the depths of the heart for the different types of religious systems that are present in this world, since they are all beneficial to those who believe in them. Even though the differences in philosophy are tremendous, often fundamental, still one can see that, relative to the interests and dispositions of various types of beings, those philosophies are appropriate and beneficial in the conduct of the persons' lives. Through understanding this, deep respect will be engendered. Today we need this kind of mutual respect and understanding." THE DALAI LAMA

Emna says

Excellent read, full of wisdom and important teaching about the aim that we need to define for our lives..I always find some sense of serenity when reading the books from Dalai Lama indeed! I will definitely read the rest of his writings. The major points of Buddhism referred to in this book are the 3 main evils for the mind : ignorance, attachment and aversion. In the opposite, the perfections of the mind are six points and are: generosity, ethics, patience, enthusiasm, concentration and wisdom. The section of questions / answers is very enjoyable as it tackles pragmatic questioning from the audience (the book is indeed a transcript of a conference that took place in London with the Dalai-Lama).

Kevin Summers says

Most of this book is esoteric, so I couldn't highly recommend it to non-Buddhists. Regardless, the book has several nuggets of wisdom.

Sample quote:

"Question: I find it difficult to comprehend all the different levels of practice. What is a simple, basic practice that I could bear in mind? Answer: At best, if you are able to do so, help others. If you are not able to do so, at least do not harm others. This is the main practice."

Kate says

Regardless of your religious affiliation, the Dalai Lama's books are always insightful and beautifully written. The text is a tad more complex than some of his other writings. For some people, this book may be a little too advanced in the teachings of Buddhism. However, for those who are deeply curious about having a deeper understanding of Buddhist teachings, this is the book for you. The Dalai Lama always teaches a way to help people find more meaning and purpose in their life.

T says

While rather esoteric at times and clearly meant to be a deep dive rather than an introduction (NOT for people new to Buddhist philosophy), I found this to be a deeply fascinating exploration of the Tibetan Buddhist world view. At times it skewed to belief systems that are specifically Tibetan (I think), but at other times it also included really excellent summaries of general Buddhist teachings on a philosophical level with a bit of humor thrown in here and there as well. It made me wish I'd been at this conference.

Juliane Roell says

I read the Q+A-parts and only skimmed the rest of the book. The questions touch many topics, not just the 12 links of dependent-arising, which is the subject of the lectures transcribed in this book. I found the Dalai Lama's answers to the questions interesting, wise and practical. Will probably come back to the book at a later time.

Frank Cardenas says

An honest account of Dalai Lama's beliefs and teachings. As the title goes, we might finally find a sense to our very nature, maybe are we here for a purpose? and in his answers you can find a possibility that makes more sense to what I have been taught so far.

Brandon says

A great "next level" book for those who practice and have already gained a moderate understand and the Way.

The deeper analysis of cause and effect in relation to cyclic existence and karma helps provide a better understanding of how your actions influence and have been influenced by previous actions. In this way, one who practices may find a themselves more effective in their attempts to understand what it means to practice in everyday life.

On the downside, the final two chapters focusing on enlightenment and buddhahood are amazingly complex and difficult to decipher. I know I didn't get it at all, and will most likely have to read these pages again many times before I ever will.

Caroline says

I listened to this book while running, as I have taken to listening to books while on a trail, in my Zen zone. So some of my difficulty following it may have been related to that. However, in my opinion, this is one of the most complicated books the Dalai Lama has written. Many parts of it make an, "aha!", with me, however, it was still difficult to understand and I found myself rewinding a few times.

However, it resonates with Jungian philosophy, the concept of the collective unconscious as well as object relations theorists. Basically, one of the main points is that attachment to objects commences with projective tendencies, or objects or situations or people that have collective meaning from reincarnation. So we already have a preconceived notion of meaning from objects. We must meditate on actual meaning in order to infer truth in order to explore inner truth.

Elixir says

If I had half an ounce more smarts I'd be able to rate this book much higher. As it is I was in way over my head, so I just plowed through and tried to glean as much from it as I could. Which was a surprising amount. The Dalai is a funny guy and he has the ability to force A-HA! moments on even the newest of us. Definitely a book I want to re-read when my Buddhist knowledge base is a little more extensive.

Robin Friedman says

As with the other books of the Dalai Lama I have read, this book combines difficult and obscure teachings with the simplicity of the everyday. The book consists of the text of a lecture series the Dalai Lama gave in London in 1984, before he received the Nobel Prize. The title of the book together with its subtitle "Buddhist perspectives on cause and effect" give some idea of its breadth.

The first two lectures in the book, together with Professor Jeffery Hopkins's introduction discuss the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of Dependent Origination. The discussion is based upon an exposition of a famous Tibetan painting of the Wheel of Existence which is beautifully reproduced, in whole and in a number of details following page 40. Turn to the painting before beginning to read the book and refer to it while reading both Hopkins and the Dalai Lama.

The Doctrine of Dependent Origination teaches the both the impermanence and interrelationship of things we take in our everyday lives as substantial. It talks about the pervasive effect of ignorance and its immediate consequences, lust and hatred, in poisoning our lives and attitudes. It offers an antidote towards breaking the wheel of selfishness in the doctrine of non-self.

If this sounds obscure, it is. In a famous Sutra in the Pali canon, the Buddha rebukes his disciple Ananda when Ananda thinks he understands the teaching. The Dalai Lama presents the doctrine not as a dispositive treatment, which can't be done, but to stimulate reflection and meditation by the reader.

Following the discussion of Dependent Origination, there are almost equally difficult discussions of the Buddhist doctrine of Karma (causality and intentionality) and discussions of specifically Tibetan Tantric practices. Interlaced with the specifically Buddhist doctrinal discussions are discussions of the goal of the doctrines which the Dalai Lama describes (page 34) as "to tame one's mental continuum-- to become nonviolent." This in turn is divided into two levels: altruism, or helping others, and, perhaps more broadly, doing no harm. According to the Dalai Lama (page 35) "The chief quality of a buddha is great compassion; this is why it is appropriate to take refuge in a buddha."

As always with the Dalai Lama, his goal is to teach and not to convert. He seems somewhat skeptical in this

book with the rush of Westerners to adopt Tibetan Buddhism which, he points out, is a form of Buddhism adopted to the specific culture of Tibet rather than to Western culture. Although Tibetan Buddhism does not recognize a creator God, he urges those people comfortable with their own religions to adhere to them as proper sources of spiritual realization and inner peace. For those unable to adopt any religion, (those committed to Western secularism) he urges reflection and self-understanding as a means to end suffering.

Similarly, the Dalai Lama emphasizes that the Buddha taught different people in different ways depending on their background and their readiness for religious teachings. Many people, particularly those in the West, must find their path through life in the everyday workaday world rather than meditating in a forest. The Dalai Lama recognizes and encourages people to work through to their salvation in a way appropriate to and consistent with their individual situation. Wise advice.

This is not one of the Dalai Lama's easier books to read. But it will stay with the careful reader. The painting of the Wheel of Dependent Origination is well reproduced, Professor Hopkins's introduction is valuable, and the book has a good bibliography for those wishing to pursue sources further. The teachings may not make the reader a Tibetan Buddhist; indeed that is not their intention. They may, however, bring some guidance and insight to the reader.

Robin Friedman
