Practicing without a License and Making Trouble along the way:
My Life in Buddhist Studies

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1. Being a philosopher

I have practiced Buddhist Studies for over a quarter century now without a license. I was never trained in Buddhist Studies. I trained as a philosopher, and when I came up in the profession, that meant that I was a student of *Western* philosophy; there wasn't any other kind, as far as I knew when I finished my PhD. I want to emphasize that back then, it wasn't that one asked whether there was non-Western philosophy, let alone whether it was any good or worth studying. There simply was no non-Western philosophy in most philosophy curricula, and that included philosophy curricula in Asian universities as well as Euro-American ones. Back then, *Western* wasn't the "unmarked case" we criticize now. It was as taken for granted that philosophy was Western as the continued existence of the earth is taken for granted when we walk.

And there was—as there still is—a gulf between the disciplines of philosophy and religious studies. Philosophy was secular, and was a rational pursuit of knowledge of the fundamental nature of reality, after all. Religious studies—at least from the perspective of philosophers—was somewhere between disguised theology, literary theory and cultural anthropology, and so either irrational and mystical, soft or, even worse, empirical. Beneath our dignity to notice, in any case. Lord knows what our colleagues in religious studies thought of us, but I am sure it was just as unflattering. So, as far as we were concerned, when *they* proved the existence of God, they *meant it*, or studied people who meant it; we just cared about the modal logic. And that was important to our professional identity: nothing we did was less than channeling the pure voice of reason; anything worth studying and arguing about is secular. Our profession, we proudly reminded ourselves, allied itself with science, not with the church, after the Galileo affair. Science, too, was European, by the way. So I studied cognitive science and modal logic and earned a PhD having never really heard of Buddhism beyond my youthful reading of Kerouac, Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg.

2. Getting dragged in

My first teaching job was at Hampshire College, and the first student who wandered in to my first office to ask me to supervise my first thesis challenged all of that. He wanted me to supervise a senior thesis on Tsongkhapa and the Social Contract Tradition. When he first explained the topic to me I actually burst out laughing. I thought he must be joking: Tibetan philosophy? What in the world could that be? But when he reassured me that some guy named Thurman up the road would handle the Tibetan part, and my job was to keep him

honest on Locke and Rousseau, I agreed to do it. Hell, I was just starting; I couldn't afford to turn students away. That decision came eventually to define the rest of my life, confirming my view that however much we might think we plan our lives and execute that plan, most of what we end up doing or achieving depends on chance.

So, for much of that year I struggled to understand the first Buddhist text I had ever encountered: the rough draft of Bob Thurman's translation of Tsongkhapa's *Drang ge legs bshad snying po, The Essence of Hermeneutics.* It was hard, but kind of cool. Sometime you should ask my wife what I sounded like trying to work through that text. Honestly, I didn't understand very much, but it was clear to me that it was worth understanding, if only I had the time to think about it. And then the student finished (he is now a famous legal scholar and law professor), and I went back to my work in logic and cognitive science. But at least I knew that *Western* was now not the only option, even if it was the default, the unmarked case.

Some time after this, I received a call out of the blue from a young Tibetan graduate student at the University of Massachusetts (now an eminent scholar of education), who asked me if I had been studying Buddhism. I said, "no, why do you ask?" He explained to me that he had recently read my book in the foundations of cognitive science, *Belief in Psychology,* and thought that the ideas had to have come from Buddhism. Well, I truthfully denied that, but as our kids were the same age, our families became friends. This turned out to be a very fortuitous meeting, another random event that was to change my life.

Seven years later came what I now see as my professional watershed. Hampshire College, after a fierce debate, adopted a strong multicultural requirement, attached to the student's concentration (a self-designed major to be completed by all students), called in somewhat overheated language, "The Third World Expectation." It required that each student, no matter what subject s/he was studying, study the way that subject is pursued in some non-Western culture. To my undying shame, I was on the wrong side of this debate. I argued that you can't require students to study what you don't teach, that we didn't have the faculty to teach so much non-Western material, and that it would be a violation of academic freedom to require those who didn't to suddenly develop and interest and a competence in a non-Western area. I am so happy now that my side lost, and I have spent most of the rest of my life refuting the argument I made then. I hope that I have somewhat atoned for that sin.

Well, the college did require us to retool to meet the expectation and set aside faculty development money to enable us to do so. So, I decided that since the only non-Western philosophy I had ever heard of was medieval Tibetan epistemology, I should learn some of that; so I applied for a grant to pay Bob Thurman to tutor me, got the grant and started my journey in Buddhist Studies.

3. How I did it

So, I started by asking Bob what I should read, and he told me. A bit of Nāgārjuna, some Candrakīrti, a little Tsongkhapa, etc… My initial goal was minimal: to learn enough to

insert one week of Indian or Tibetan material into an epistemology course, and thereby pay my debt to the Third World Expectation. That's what I did the first summer, and the students loved the new material. So did I. So, the next year, I applied for a bigger grant to develop a more explicitly comparative epistemology course. That was even more fun.

But a problem was emerging. As I read the little that was then available in English, I would keep running up, as one does, against references to other texts, and I'd make phone calls to Bob, like, "Hey, Bob, do you have a text around called the *Buddhapalitā?*" And he'd say, "yes, but it's only available in Tibetan." This went on for a lot of texts, and made it clear to me that if wanted to make any progress in Buddhist philosophy beyond the pure charlatanism I was then inhabiting, I would have to learn Tibetan. Fortunately, there was a monk at the local Dharma center, and an Amherst College student named Jonathan Gold (now an eminent Buddhist Studies scholar at Princeton) who also wanted to learn Tibetan. So, together we approached the ven Geshe Lobsang Tsetan (now Tashi Lhunpo Khenpo Rinpoche), and he graciously agreed to teach us. (I won't go into the sometimes hilarious story of our struggles to learn Tibetan, but it was fun.)

And then on the horizon was an NEH summer institute at the University of Hawai'i, run by the late David Kalupahana, the late Ken Inada, and Steve Odin, on Nāgārjuna and Asian Thought. I never thought I'd have a prayer of getting in, but the chance to spend six weeks in Hawai'i studying Nāgārjuna was too much not to go after. My wife and kids graciously let me apply; for some reason I was accepted into the institute despite knowing next to nothing, and it was just fabulous. I met Guy Newland there, who was on the teaching team, and that was the beginning of a long and happy collegial relationship. That institute brought to completion by first paper in Buddhist Studies—an essay on skepticism in Greek and Madhyamaka philosophy that emerged from the teaching I had been doing—and planted the seed for my Nāgārjuna translation.

But by this time Buddhist philosophy was turning into a real interest, and I was asking people where, if you are interested in Tibetan Buddhist Studies, do you go to learn something. Almost everyone I asked said "go to the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (now the Central University of Tibetan Studies) in Sarnath, and if you are lucky, you might get to study with Geshe Yeshes Thabkhas." I mentioned this to the young Tibetan friend I had met befriended a year earlier, and he told me that he was actually an alumnus or that institution, was good friends with the Director, the most ven Prof Samdhong Rinpoche (who was later to become the first Kalon Tripa, or Prime Minister of the Tibetan government in exile) and had been a student of Geshe Yeshes Thabkhas. If I could get to India, he said, he could provide the necessary introductions.

So, I asked my wife and she was game. We applied for an Indo-American Fellowship, one of the greatest fellowships I have ever heard of. It was available only to people with no prior experience in India who were getting interested in something Indian, and would fund an entire family for a year. That sounded too good to be true. We applied; we got it; we took lots of advice, lots of stuff, including our two young sons who were then 6 and 10, and headed to Sarnath.

Things were different when we first went to India. Today travel to India is pretty routine. But this was 1990, before "the opening." When we arrived in Sarnath, there were no telephone lines; electricity, and so water, came for two hours each day—maybe; and Sarnath was a sleepy village 10 km outside of Varanasi beyond a bit of a stretch of jungle. Today it is an upscale suburb in the outer Varanasi sprawl where the wealthy of the area build their palaces. You can't imagine the backwater village it was back then. Anyway, we, as a clueless family with two small kids, arrived in the steamy heat of an August dawn at the Varanasi station, after a train ride in which we shared a compartment with a renowned Indian vocal artist who generously introduced us to the glories of Indian classical music and a banker who opined that India would be good for our children as they could learn proper English speaking. Two people in our carriage apparently died before reaching Kashi. The station seemed impossibly exotic, crowded and simultaneously terrifying and overwhelmingly beautiful; a weird oriental masterpiece by Jerome. My lovely wife asked me, "my God, what have we done?" I could only reply, "we have embarked on an adventure."

And we had; at first, despite some challenges, we seemed afloat in our new environment, although always on the verge of being overwhelmed. Varanasi is like that. After a few days settling in a hotel and getting paperwork in order, we moved out to Sarnath. We had been advised by our friends to stay at the Chinese temple while seeking more permanent digs. And so we took a taxi laden with our provisions for a year in India to the Chinese temple, where indeed they had a large room for our family. All was going according to plan.

Then—although I remember none of this—I became ill; two days after our arrival, I developed a high fever and became unconscious. Please imagine my wife and two small children in a town without phones and regular electricity or running water, where we knew nobody and did not speak any of the local languages, with me unconscious and feverish for two days. I still can't comprehend it. But when I awoke, with a terrible headache, and my wife asked me whether I could hear her, I affirmed that I could, and immediately asked was, "who is he?," meaning the somewhat older Tibetan monk who was sponging my forehead. She replied that she didn't know, and he didn't seem to speak English, but that he hadn't left my side for two days, and had been continuously wiping me down with cold water. That was Geshe Yeshes Thabkhas, who was to become my teacher, and that is how I met him. He lived—and still lives—in the Chinese temple, heard that a foreigner was ill, and probably saved his life. And, I might add, defined what remained of it.

So, we spent the year, mostly in Sarnath, but traveling around a bit, visiting Dharamasala, Drepung, Ganden and Sera, Nepal, as well as Buddhist pilgrimage spots. Geshe-la taught me *Mūlamadhyamakakakārikā, Vigrahavyāvartanī* and a few other texts, but mostly taught me how to read, how to think, and how to use commentaries. I worked with Samdhong Rinpoche on some curricular projects and with the ven Geshe Ngawang Samten on *Madhyamakāvatāra.* He now directs the Central University of Tibetan Studies, and a few years later we collaborated on a translation of Tsongkhapa's *rTsa she tik chen,* one of Tibet's greatest commentaries on *Mūlamadhyamakakakārikā.* Although my fellowship was a research grant, I also taught the history of Western philosophy to Tibetan students at Sarnath. It seemed like the right thing to do at the time. I had little else to give in return for

the gifts of teachings bestowed upon me, and teaching in that environment was way too much fun.

While in Sarnath, I met the late Gen Lobsang Gyatso, then director the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics. He was down in Sarnath for the Kalachakra initiation and teachings in December-January of that year. Samdhong Rinpoche suggested to me that I might offer to teach Western philosophy at the Dialectics Institute. So, I went to his tent outside of the Tibetan temple, and offered to do so. He regarded me with a condescending smile and said, "It is good that you have come to India to study Buddhist philosophy, for as everyone knows, the Buddhist tradition is both vast and profound. But everyone also knows that Western philosophy is shallow and materialistic, and so we have no need of it. Thank you for your offer, but no thanks."

Well, I like a good philosophical fight as much as anybody, and so I replied that Western philosophy is not as shallow as Gen-la might think, and that it might even have something to teach a Buddhist philosopher. He cocked an eyebrow, and he asked, "So, what is your best Western text?" I replied, "Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason.*" He took the bait: "All right, come to Dharamsala and teach this *Critique of Pure Reason* and we will see how good it is. And so began a long and rewarding relationship with the late Gen Lobsang Gyatso and the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics.

After a few sessions of a very animated seminar in Dharamsala on the *Critique,* when had just finished discussing the Transcendental Aesthetic—a slow process given the stupendous difficulty of translating Kant's language and framework into philosophical Tibetan—Gen-la announced that this book was important and that we had to translate it into Tibetan. Fortunately, some of my colleagues and I were able to convince him that that might be premature; but he did insist that we have a textbook on Western philosophy for Tibetans. This led eventually to the composition of *Western Idealism and its Critics,* in collaboration with the ven Geshe Damdul Namgyal, published a few years later in facing Tibetan and English, a book that has allowed the penetration of Western philosophy into the Tibetan monastic curriculum. Cross-cultural collaboration, if it is to mean anything, I believe, must pave a two-way road, and cannot simply be a matter of carting off to our universities what we find elsewhere.

And a few months after that seminar began, our family was granted an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who had heard about what we had been up to. I asked him at that audience what I could do when I returned to the West, as a philosopher, to benefit the Tibetan community. He responded immediately that I should institute an academic exchange program between my college in America and the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies and the Institute for Buddhist Dialectics in India. He wanted American students should come to study at these Tibetan universities, and Tibetan students to study in America. He wanted professors from each side to teach on the other side, and he wanted joint research projects to be established.

Now, that was a challenge. I had no experience designing or leading exchange or study abroad programs, and I taught at a small college in chronic financial straits. CIHTS and the

Dialectics Institute weren't in much better shape, financially, I could tell, and they hardly had the infrastructure or experience to launch a complex exchange program. And travel between India and the USA was still far from routine. But when His Holiness asks one to jump, one jumps, and on the way up you ask how far. So, I went to Samdhong Rinpoche upon return to Sarnath and told him what His Holiness wanted. He agreed that it was daunting, but also agreed that we had to do it. We sketched a plan. Upon return to the USA, I took that plan to my college president, and to my astonishment, it was accepted and funded. That program, now the Five College Tibetan Studies in India Program, celebrated its Silver Jubilee in Sarnath last year. Its daughter programs, the University of Tasmania Buddhist Studies in India Program and the Deakin University Buddhist Studies are going strong 20 years from their founding.

These programs gave many young scholars now attaining prominence in Buddhist Studies, and others just entering the profession in South Asian Studies, Philosophy or Religious Studies their starts in the field. Most never dreamed of careers in these field prior to participation. Tibetan students who have participated have created international careers for Tibetan students at Radio Free Tibet, in Tibetan libraries, in social work, film, neuroscience and other fields. The program has generated translations of important texts, research in the psychology of religious practice and in Tibetan linguistics, and has enhanced academic life in countless ways at the participating institutions. It has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my professional life.

When my family and I returned to the United States after one year in India, we all realized that our lives were changed profoundly and permanently. The two sons who accompanied us have grown up never believing that there is a "normal" pole to culture or ideology, comfortable with diversity, and thinking of the world, not any single country as their home. They understand the importance of care and commitment as the foundation of a good life. My wife and I have remained involved in Buddhist communities and in Tibetan communities and causes, and regularly spend time in India—I am there every year.

The focus of my professional work shifted dramatically; while I continue to work in Western philosophy, logic and cognitive science, the bulk of my research and teaching now addresses topics or texts in Buddhist philosophy and cross-cultural interpretation. Even my work in Western philosophy is deeply inflected by Buddhist thought, and my research in cognitive science addresses such topics as the impact of meditative practice on perceptions of personal identity, or on the acquisition of Tibetan evidentials. A passage to India leaves nobody unchanged, and there is no easy exit from an immersion in the Tibetan academic community.

4. Getting in trouble

But I am, after all, a philosopher, and my professional identification had not changed, even if my teaching and research focus had. As a consequence, I found myself in some professional trouble. Philosophy has made some progress, but in the early 1990's Buddhist Studies meant *Religious Studies,* and to engage in that enterprise, to most philosophers, meant descent into the realm of the irrational and mystical, a fall from reason. I found colleagues wondering why I wasn't teaching *philosophy* courses, when I taught Nāgārjuna;

an email reply from a rather well-known philosopher to a paper I published that used an argument drawn from *Mūlamadhayamakakārikā* criticized one of his views read, "if you have to go to Tibet (*sic.*) to refute me, I win." There was no need to respond to my argument; as far as he was concerned, it was necessary only to point out that it was out of philosophical bounds. A journal editor asked me if I still wanted to review for his journal now that I had left philosophy for religious studies.

In short, there was brief period in my academic life when I did experience a real professional cost to my entry into the world of Buddhist Studies. My work was no longer taken as seriously by those who had previously constituted my professional community. And my word was no longer as effective on behalf of my students. I will not pretend that that was not painful. (Nor can I pretend that it is entirely a thing of the past, but I have simply stopped paying attention to the people who don't take the work that I do seriously; at first it was harder to ignore the opprobrium.) It was only once some of my work began to attract attention from a few prominent open-minded people in my field—really, after I moved to Australia—that I was able to feel at home in philosophy again. So, I have to caution anyone in my profession who takes this route: it is fraught with some danger. Fortunately, however, I can also say that the situation is now much less dangers than it was in the 1990's, and, as the lyrics go, things are getting better all the time.

5. Making trouble

I responded to getting into professional trouble by making professional trouble of my own. At some point, I decided to take the fight to the philosophical community. The first occasion was a special plenary panel on Philosophy in the 21st century at the 2000 meetings of the Australasian Association of Philosophy. I argued that the distinctive development in our profession in the new century would be its globalization, that this would enrich the profession enormously, and that it would make philosophy far more relevant to the academic world and the larger public than it had hitherto been. The response from one of my co-panelists—a historian of Western philosophy from the University of Sydney—was scathing: there is no such thing as non-Western philosophy; if we pretend that there is, we debase the rational pursuit of truth with mysticism, irrationality and religious dogma. The ensuing debate was far from polite, but I left no doubt in the minds of those in attendance regarding the racism, ignorance, and irrational prejudice involved in condemning all non-European traditions without having read a word published in any of them. I have never been polite about this since then.

I now see the task of reforming academic philosophy by globalizing it as a central part of my life's work, and as part of my service both the Philosophy and to Buddhist Studies. I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to lead philosophy programs in Australia and Singapore, where colleagues enthusiastically embraced the globalization of the curriculum, and where excellent cross-cultural programs are now in place. Nonetheless, overall, the discipline of philosophy has lagged well behind other humanities fields in confronting and remediating its Eurocentrism. I have noted that progress has been made over the past few decades, but it has been slow, and a lot more remains to be done. There are very few top graduate programs—whether in the USA or overseas—that offer the opportunity to study non-Western philosophy. This means that few of those entering the

job market in this discipline are even familiar with anything beyond the European tradition, resulting in turn in a dearth of curricular offerings in undergraduate philosophy curricula, or courses taught by relative amateurs.

In a recent op-ed in the New York Times (in its philosophy column "The Stone") Bryan van Norden and I made this point. A look at the nearly one thousand replies that column received on its first day, or at the blogs and replies that followed is sobering—sometimes depressing—but instructive. The fact that because philosophy departments have been so slow to globalize their curriculum and to hire philosophers who work outside the Western tradition means that most non-Western philosophy is still taught in departments of religious studies or areas studies. This in turn only reinforces the idea that it is "not really philosophy."

The small progress we have seen has come from two directions. First, a few awakened philosophers who have started to notice both the problem and the richness of traditions such as the Buddhist tradition (but also African, orthodox Indian, classical Chinese, native American, and other under-represented traditions) have joined the fight to diversify the field, and some have been high-profile enough to have an impact. Second, pressure from students who are excited by these traditions encourages departments to offer more courses outside of the Western tradition, and so to advertise positions for people who know something, and so to encourage graduate programs to provide some relative training, Perhaps our grandchildren will live to see the true globalization of philosophy. But until then, making trouble is part of my job description.

I should note that I have made sure that my troublemaking is equal opportunity. I have recently been working with a few colleagues in cognitive science, both in the United States and at the Central University of Tibetan Studies in India on some empirical research on the impact of religious practice and ideology on one's sense of identity over time and on attitudes towards death and post-mortem existence. Some of the results were somewhat surprising: increased confident in selflessness, for instance, results in a heightened, not an ameliorated level of death anxiety, and in particular, a great deal of anxiety regarding self-annihilation at death (that is, the annihilation of the self one doesn't believe one has!) and Tibetan monastics were the most fearful of death of any of the groups we studied, Christian, Buddhist or Hindu.

When we presented these data at Sarnath, we were not popular at all. I was accused of being an enemy of the Dharma, of repaying my teachers' kindness with slander, etc… People responded that we must have coded the data wrong; that we must have falsified it. Once they were convinced that the data were real, they argued that we should have suppressed it so as not to cause people to lose faith in the Buddhadharma. We continue to push forward, needless to say. (I might add that some of our colleagues in Mind and Life were no less certain without having seen the data, that we must have done something wrong!)

I have also continued to work assiduously to ensure that Western philosophy gets the respect it deserves in the Buddhist world. There is a widespread prejudice, I have found,

shared by Western and Asian academics and public intellectuals that in cross-cultural intellectual exchange, the West brings science and technology to the table—usually through cognitive science and physics—and that the East brings philosophical wisdom. Asian people can't do creative science; white people can't think deeply. I abhor this version of orientalism/Occidentalism. So I continue to teach and to write about Western philosophy for Tibetan audiences, and at events such as Mind and Life meetings, I work to show how Western philosophical ideas can inform thinking about the mind and human life, and how some Buddhist ideas may be just plain wrong (this is not as bad as one might think, of course, since both sides of most interesting issues have been defended in the Buddhist world, and not everyone can be correct, even among the assembly of canonical authorities). So, for instance, at recent meetings with His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Kyoto and at Sera, I focused on the limitations of introspective or meditative techniques as modes of access to the mind, and on the pervasiveness of cognitive illusion in our lives, drawing on Hume and Sellars, as well as on Tsongkhapa to make these points. Real dialogue requires each side to take the other seriously, and to come to the table with both respect for and suspicion of, authority.

6. Professional training: Buddhist Studies and disciplinary boundaries

Buddhist Studies is a remarkably interdisciplinary field, and for that I am grateful. I attend meetings of philosophical societies, IABS and the AAR, and feel at home in each setting. I lecture at Philosophy departments, Asian Studies departments, departments of Religious Studies and in Buddhist Studies programs, as well as at a variety of Dharma centers, and I find that I can talk about the same stuff—with adjustments in vocabulary and presumed background—in each setting. And in our own Five College Buddhist Studies program, we enjoy collaboration between art historians, religious studies scholars, philosophers, literary theorists, a novelist and an anthropologist. This multidisciplinarity adds richness to the study, and also allows many ways in.

Nonetheless, I do lament that having come to Buddhist Studies so late in my professional life, and being rather bad a learning languages—I am limited to Tibetan, French and English. If I had to do it again, I would do what I now advise my students to do: start learning lots of languages early. I lament the fact that I read neither Sanskrit nor Pāli nor classical Chinese. And now I am acutely feeling the absence of Japanese. So, I guess that while I celebrate the multiple ways one can enter this field, I still think that good philological skills are more than a mere desideratum.

7. Program development, collaboration and collegiality

As I noted above, one of the most rewarding aspects of my academic life has been working to build and to sustain programs that enable students to learn, and programs that ensure that cross-cultural philosophy and research benefits parties on all sides, and generates real dialogue. There are lots of reasons to do this, some altruistic and some self-interested. Fortunately, they converge. I advise anyone entering or working in our profession: build international programs! They will enable you to develop your research program; they will attract the best students in Buddhist Studies to your doorstep; they will take you to wonderful places; they will facilitate interactions with superb colleagues. But besides all of those benefits to yourself, they will help the next generation of students in Buddhist

Studies to get started; they will facilitate the international integration of our field; they will create opportunities for students and scholars in communities that are not as wealthy, privileged or powerful as yours to benefit from some of that wealth, privilege and power.

Collaboration in a broader sense has been essential to my professional life. I count over 40 co-authors now, and without them, I never could have had the life I have now. There is an unfortunate model of the professorial life in the humanities of the solo hermit scholar, locked in her library carrel, office or cave, rubbing texts together while breathing individual insight to kindle the sparks of knowledge. The sciences abandoned that model long ago; so should we, and for the same reasons: it simply limits what one can do and it reduces the quality of one's work and of one's life.

I have worked in dyads, and as a member of teams comprising up to 10 members (e.g. the Cowherds), and I have always been happy for the collaboration. A team can attack bigger and more complex problems than any single person, and, by combining the skills of a diverse set of scholars, a team ensures that the errors committed by one are corrected by others, and that diverse skill sets and perspectives are brought to bear on a project. I learn from my colleagues when I work with them; young scholars bring fresh perspectives; more mature scholars bring experience and wisdom; modern scholars bring the latest professional technique; traditional scholars bring a wealth of textual knowledge and commentarial skill. All of this enhances the experience and the product.

In short, one does better, more interesting, more ambitious work when working in a team, one learns a lot more than one would otherwise, and it is a lot more fun than working alone. I advise all of my colleagues to adopt this research model; just make sure that you choose people with whom you enjoy working, whose skills complement, not duplicate, your own and those of others, from whom you can hear and accept critique, and who are flexible, intellectually honest, and in general play well with others. If you do so, I promise, your life and your work will be better for it.

I have benefitted in countless other ways from wonderful colleagues from all over the world. Anybody who claims that s/he built her career on her own is a fool or a liar. We all learn from others, rely on others for critique and assistance, and owe others critique and assistance in return. So, my advice to anyone in this profession is to find good colleagues, and be a good colleague and a friend, and your life will be better for it; and don't forget to acknowledge what you learn from your students as well as what you learn from your seniors. One of the things I love most about teaching is that my students teach me so much. And don't forget to take joy in your teaching and in the accomplishments of your students and peers. That is one of the great benefits of our profession, and it is there for the taking.

8. On Buddhist Studies and Buddhism

Some years ago, HH the Dalai Lama was visiting Smith College and the Five Colleges. Part of his visit involved a seminar with Five College Buddhist Studies faculty members on the role of academic Buddhist Studies in the transmission of Buddhadharma to the West. There about 20 faculty members around the seminar table with him. He opened the seminar by asking two questions: The first was, "how many of you have been asked by your students

whether you are a Buddhist?" Not surprisingly, all hands went up. He then asked, "how many of you answer that question?" About half the hands went up. His Holiness then advised us never to answer that question: suppose you say, "yes." Then, he argued, there would undoubtedly be non-Buddhist students in the classroom who would fear that you are trying to proselytize, and so would learn less from you than they might otherwise. Suppose, on the other hand, you say, "no." Then there may be Buddhist students in the room who believe that you are a heretic and so they shouldn't listen to you and would learn less from you than they might otherwise. Our job, he emphasized, is to be effective teachers of Buddhism, and to do that, we have to keep our own religious commitments out of the classroom, no matter what they are. (He also joked that he tried to do the same thing, but that nobody believes him.)

That is sage advice. As a scholar, my job is to learn and to communicate what I learn; as a teacher, my job is to facilitate my students' learning. All of that is independent of how religious or irreligious I am, and of what practice, if any, I have. So, I keep that stuff private, and I would advise anyone who is a professional in Buddhist Studies to do the same. And that is so whether I am teaching in a college or a Dharma center. Our religious life, if any, may benefit from our study and teaching; our study and teaching may benefit or not from religious practice. But to make your practice or lack thereof a feature of one's public persona will only undermine one's professional life. Or so I think.

It is always dangerous for old people to speculate on the future. Most of my life is in the past, and others will shape our discipline over the next decades. But here are a few thoughts and hopes. Our field will always be grounded in strong philological research and will depend for its development and for its relevance to the larger academic community on those willing and able to toil at translation. By translating we transmit the Buddhist tradition, just as translation was essential to its transmission in Asia over the past few millennia. But as we translate and transmit, we also transform Buddhism as well as the cultures our work enables it to penetrate, and we should be self-conscious and reflective about our roles in this complex process. There is nothing wrong with transformation; after all, we work on a tradition committed to the impermanence of all phenomena. But it is also our job to study it! So, I hope and expect that Buddhist Studies will embrace the study of contemporary and yet-to-emerge Buddhist ideas, practices and communities. We must never allow ourselves to degenerate into a community of antiquarians.

Our strength will always lie in our interdisciplinarity, and we must continue to welcome others into our fold, and to learn from the methodologies and ideas of those who come to Buddhist Studies from outside. I particularly hope that we can open our sense of what counts as Buddhist. We are properly concerned with history and lineage; but we should also be concerned with the seals of doctrine. And if we open our minds to the possibility of Buddhist ideas worthy of our study originating outside of the traditionally Buddhist world, we may find intellectual resources that will deepen our understanding of Buddhism itself, just as the understanding of Buddhism can help us to deepen our appreciation of non-Buddhist traditions.

Let me indulge in one first-person example. I love teaching Hume to Tibetan monastic audiences. At a recent faculty and graduate seminar on parts of the *Treatise of Human Nature* at Sarnath, two geshes argued about whether Hume was a Prāsaṅgika or a Svātantrika mādhyamika. Now, most of us would agree that that doxographic battle is probably ill-conceived as the best way to engage with the *Treatise.* But to me, the more interesting point is that neither of them for a moment thought that Hume—Scottish atheist though he was—was not a mādhyamika.

I am now writing a book on the *Treatise* in which reverse the usual hermeneutic strategy of explaining Buddhist texts by comparing them in some way to Western texts by commenting on the *Treatise* by showing how it recapitulates themes developed in the Indian Buddhist world (more snarky troublemaking, but a useful project, I think). I hope that this book will be read not only by Western Hume scholars, but also by my colleagues in Buddhist Studies, and that we can see our way to opening our canon to recognizably Buddhist ideas and arguments from outside. If so, Buddhist Studies may expand its purview, expand its interdisciplinary reach, and become simply more useful to the world at large.

9. Closing Thoughts

A friend of mine who was a geriatric clinical psychologist once told me that he often worked with clients who were depressed at the end of their lives because they realized that they passed up chances, usually due to the fear of risk; he told me that he had yet to meet an elderly client who was depressed because s/he had in fact taken a risk and failed. My life so far confirms that observation. Each apparently crazy risk has paid off. I started my teaching career by saying "yes" to a student I had no business supervising; I took my young family to India with no idea of what awaited us; I entered a profession for which I had no training. I helped to start an international exchange program among institutions who were clueless about how to do that, when I had no idea what I was doing. And it all worked out well. I would advise anyone starting out to be just as reckless.

I have now had just over a quarter century in Buddhist Studies, and I have loved every minute of it. I have developed many deep friendships with teachers, colleagues and students. My life is better for it. And I am grateful that I have been allowed into this community despite having no real license and no real training. That in itself is an indication of what a welcoming community we have. I hope that those who follow will work to keep it that way.