

## A Note to Readers

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Any book with a title like *Why Buddhism Is True* should have some careful qualification somewhere along the way. We might as well get that over with:

1. I'm not talking about the "supernatural" or more exotically metaphysical parts of Buddhism—reincarnation, for example—but rather about the naturalistic parts: ideas that fall squarely within modern psychology and philosophy. That said, I *am* talking about some of Buddhism's more extraordinary, even radical, claims—claims that, if you take them seriously, could revolutionize your view of yourself and of the world. This book is intended to get you to take these claims seriously.

2. I'm of course aware that there's no one Buddhism, but rather various Buddhist traditions, which differ on all kinds of doctrines. But this book focuses on a kind of "common core"—fundamental ideas that are found across the major Buddhist traditions, even if they get different degrees of emphasis, and may assume somewhat different form, in different traditions.

3. I'm not getting into super-fine-grained parts of Buddhist psychology and philosophy. For example, the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*, a collection of early Buddhist texts, asserts that there are eighty-nine kinds of consciousness, twelve of which are unwholesome. You may be relieved to hear that this book will spend no time trying to evaluate that claim.

4. I realize that *true* is a tricky word, and asserting the truth of anything, certainly including deep ideas in philosophy or psychology, is a tricky business. In fact, one big lesson from

Buddhism is to be suspicious of the intuition that your ordinary way of perceiving the world brings you the truth about it. Some early Buddhist writings go so far as to raise doubts about whether such a thing as “truth” ultimately exists. On the other hand, the Buddha, in his most famous sermon, lays out what are commonly called “The Four Noble Truths,” so it’s not as if the word *true* has no place in discussions of Buddhist thought. In any event, I’ll try to proceed with appropriate humility and nuance as I make my argument that Buddhism’s diagnosis of the human predicament is fundamentally correct, and that its prescription is deeply valid and urgently important.

5. Asserting the validity of core Buddhist ideas doesn’t necessarily say anything, one way or the other, about other spiritual or philosophical traditions. There will sometimes be logical tension between a Buddhist idea and an idea in another tradition, but often there won’t be. The Dalai Lama has said, “Don’t try to use what you learn from Buddhism to be a better Buddhist; use it to be a better whatever-you-already-are.”

—Robert Wright