The essence of all spiritual life is your attitude to others.
—His Holiness the Dalai Lama

With clarity and candor, the Dalai Lama expounds on the core teachings of Buddhism. Fusing ancient wisdom with a modern sensibility, he gently encourages each of us to embrace lives of love and compassion; to embrace individual responsibility. His pithy reflections encourage us to rid ourselves of preoccupation with the ephemera of daily life and to find refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Inspiring, provocative, and thoughtful, this slim volume will be read and treasured for years to come.
FOREWORD

I am honored to write a “little introduction” to His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s Little Book of Buddhism! In an age when the internet is trolled in a misguided search for “truths,” one can find many quotes there attributed to His Holiness; many of these quotes are things that I am sure he did not say, though usually the misattributions are well-meaning, if not a bit cloying and over-sentimental. How lucky we are to have this current volume, directly authored by His Holiness. This Little Book is so encouraging and precious—His Holiness’ patient and gentle but highly acute intelligence and unfailingly honest and direct...
expression come shining through. All of the short aphorisms are well chosen by the formidable compiler and editor, Ms. Renuka Singh, who has known His Holiness and worked on many Buddhist projects over the years. Her deep experience of the subject is well demonstrated by her excellent selections for this collection.

The other day a good friend of mine complained to someone else in a conversation I was part of, “Tell me—isn’t the Dalai Lama ever wrong?”

The other person remained silent, though he was clearly trying to think of something to fault, just to show he wasn’t idealizing the man. In an effort to help out, I intervened, “Well, I think he is wrong sometimes!”

My friend looked excited.

I said, “I think he is too nice sometimes, always polite
and gentle, not wanting to push people beyond what he thinks they can absorb, so he can be over-solicitous of people.”

My friend was a bit disappointed.

The thing about such reactions to the Dalai Lama’s remarkably no-nonsense persona is that it resembles the reaction most modern people have to the Shakya-muni Buddha as a figure in history. Scholars about “Buddhism” are, surprisingly, mostly like that, as are also “ordinary” people; they just cannot grasp that there might be such a thing as an “enlightened person.” They are so full of misplaced confidence in the absolute rightness of the way they see things that they cannot imagine a consciousness higher and more perceptive than their own—actually enlightened.
“Enlightened” in this sense doesn’t just mean “rational,” which is how we have tended to think due to our definition of the Western “Enlightenment” of the 17th and 18th centuries, also known as the “Age of Reason.” A buddha’s enlightenment is believed indeed to make him what is called “personification of reason” (Sanskrit, pramābhūta), but his enlightenment also makes him universally compassionate, blissful, and loving, to an almost divine degree. Buddha is called “the God beyond gods” (Devātideva), and the “God who Lovingly Looks After Us” (Avalokiteśvara)—a buddha who remains a bodhisattva (buddha-to-be) forever in order to remain close to and helpful to suffering beings.

In Tibetan belief, the Dalai Lama is believed to be an important manifestation of Avalokiteśvara’s myriad
emanations who range around the planet among all species of beings in order to alleviate suffering and benefit those in need of help.

I myself do not know for sure if the Dalai Lama really is such an emanation; I don’t even know for sure if there is any such thing as a perfectly enlightened buddha, as briefly sketched above. I would have to be enlightened myself in order to know that for sure—and I am not. And in the fifty years during which I have personally known the Dalai Lama, I have often heard him disclaim any such status for himself, and even contradict others who pronounce him something extraordinary. I introduced him at his first lecture in Saunders Theater at Harvard in 1981, and I went into detail about him being the incarnation of Avalokiteshvara,
and explained who Avalokiteshvara of the thousand arms and eyes is, etc. etc., and as he was rising to go to the podium to speak, he whispered to me, with a mixture of a twinkle and a frown, something to the effect, “Don’t over-promise for your speaker in case he might disgrace you!” I certainly blushed as I sat down—it embarrasses me to remember it—but he certainly did give a marvelous address, entirely off the cuff, in broken but heartfelt and expressive English, with some help from his interpreter.

However, in spite of his protests, he is an amazing person. As I get older, both he and the Shakyamuni Buddha appear to me to be more and more amazing—as I watch him in action, it seems at moments as if they are the very same person. I don’t know, but at least, what
I have learned of their deeds, and experienced of His Holiness personally, has gradually convinced me that there is such a thing as a higher consciousness. There are people who see more clearly than I do, than most people do. They do have good advice, which can help us again and again as we come back to it again and again and apply it to the ongoing struggles of life. And that means that we also, in success and adversity, in calm and upset moments, can learn step by step to deal with our own unruly emotions, and then get along better with others. We can learn to understand their sometimes surprising and often troubling behaviors, and so “uplevel” our dealings with them, and not get dragged into vicious cycles of reactivity. Quoting at random from this *Little Book*: 
“Sometimes your dear friend, though still the same person, feels more like an enemy. Instead of love, you feel hostility. But with genuine love and compassion, another person’s appearance or behavior has no effect on your attitude.”

This kind of thing certainly does happen, even in families. And here, the Dalai Lama is honoring us: he is implying that we also can attain such a genuine love and compassion. He thus encourages us to make the effort, since such an expanded emotional security is indeed attainable by us, too, slowly but surely. He couldn’t say such a thing if (a) he himself hadn’t made such a progress in freeing himself from the “normal” kind of hostile reactivity under stress, and (b) hadn’t seen people around him also shift in that direction.
This is movement toward “enlightenment,” this kind of inner strength and cheerful demeanor from the heart. It is not at all a matter of meditating alone and having a eureka! moment, and then ascending away from everyone into some imagined state of self-centered, frozen isolation.

So Buddha might have been wrong, the Dalai Lama might be wrong. Actually they both encourage us to try to find out where they do go wrong. The Dalai Lama often likes to quote a famous verse from the Dense Array Sutra: “Mendicants! Wise persons take my words as a goldsmith buys his gold, after cutting, melting, and rubbing on a touchstone, and only after thorough examination do they accept them—not just out of devotion.” Recently I was present at a 10,000 person teaching in
Switzerland where His Holiness was commenting on this verse, and at one point he leaned passionately forward in the high teacher’s seat (the traditional Tibetan formal setup), and said, “You must think carefully about what I am saying, not just listen passively. Why, I can just see in my mind’s eye Shakyamuni Buddha himself, begging his disciples, ‘Please find out if I said something wrong! Please think this over and look for faults and advantages and then make use of it, make it your own.’” Then he quoted the verse, and his posture completely sent out the message that the teacher is the servant of the student, seeking to provide the students the tools with which to improve and liberate themselves; that the teacher is not just a domineering authority figure who thinks he has something his students don’t and their only
hope is just to obey and imitate him as best they can. It was deeply moving, but I could sense a slight discomfort on the part of those other teachers in the audience who were thinking they are the authorities, and those students who were expecting the teacher to do something for them that they wouldn’t have to do for themselves.

So here we are with the great and deep, sweet and challenging, supporting and inspiring aphorisms of this wonderful person offering us his invaluable service, providing us with tools of insights he has gained from eight decades of his broad and often difficult experience, and his vast and persistent studies of the thoughts of others in the Buddhist spiritual university tradition, and of his own thinking patterns in the meditational university of his mind. They are so well arranged by the sensitive
and learned editor, I welcome you to them in the full-est confidence that you will find these gems of advice enlightening to both head and heart. Whatever you may think about yourself, you must have an excellent intelligence or you wouldn’t have opened this book. Your good heart will find here nourishment, skill and courage to proceed, step by step. Finally, again at random,

“Cultivating closeness and warmth for others automatically puts the mind at ease. It is the ultimate source of success in life.”

—Robert A. F. “Tenzin Dharmakīrti” Thurman, Professor of Buddhist Studies, Columbia University
The common enemy of all religious disciplines is selfishness of mind. For it is just this which causes ignorance, anger and passion, which are at the root of all the troubles of the world.
Buddha is the teacher, Dharma is the actual refuge and the Sangha is the one which assists in understanding or establishing the objects of refuge.
When we take the Buddha as an authority, as a reliable teacher, we do so on the basis of having investigated and examined his principal teaching—the Four Noble Truths.
Whenever Buddhism has taken root in a new land, there has been a certain variation in the style in which it is observed. The Buddha himself taught differently according to the place, the occasion and the situation of those who were listening to him.