



# Finding Happiness in Difficult Times

H.H. the 42<sup>nd</sup> Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche



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By the merit of this work, may Their Holinesses the Sakya Trichen and Sakya Trizin enjoy perfect health and extremely long lives, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.

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# Mundane Happiness Versus Ultimate Happiness

All beings in this world, in saṃsāra, wish to be happy and to overcome suffering. But due to ignorance, most of us do not know the cause of happiness and suffering. Although we wish to be happy, we engage in negative actions that destroy the very cause of happiness, and so, we cannot fulfill our wish. Yet we all have this common goal: to achieve happiness and to overcome suffering.

Happiness has many different levels. For example, mundane or worldly happiness is one type. In the Buddhist path, we can also talk about the happiness of the path of accumulation, the happiness of the path of application, and so on<sup>1</sup>. There are many levels of happiness both in the mundane world and in the Buddhist path.

As Buddhists, especially as Mahāyāna Buddhists, we should strive to attain the highest goal, which is buddhahood. The state of buddhahood is the state in which we experience ultimate happiness, free from all faults, suffering, and obscurations. This is the highest and purest form of happiness. Not only is it a pure and ultimate happiness, but also it will last forever.

But at the present moment, due to our delusions, most of us wish to gain only mundane happiness or happiness in this life. This life is an extremely short period of time. Generally speaking, it will be less than a hundred years, with only a few exceptions. Most beings die before they are a hundred years old. Compared to an eon, a hundred years or less is a very short period of time. So timewise, mundane happiness does not last long.

In addition, the cause of mundane happiness is often not pure because people can achieve mundane happiness by performing negative actions. For example, through negative actions, one may gain wealth and mundane happiness, like living in a fine house and so on. Although the cause of mundane happiness is not always impure, most of the time it is.

The nature of mundane happiness is not genuine happiness because of the three types of suffering explained in Buddhist teachings: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and the suffering of the conditional nature of all phenomena.

The suffering of suffering refers to feelings of suffering such as physical pain, mental anxiety, sickness, and so on. It is what ordinary people consider to be suffering.

The suffering of change includes the feelings of happiness we experience in this life or in the mundane world. Mundane happiness, which is not real happiness, is actually the suffering of change. For example, if a poor person suddenly moves into a luxurious home, in the beginning they may experience happiness.



But a luxurious home is not a genuine cause of happiness. If it were a genuine cause of happiness, then the longer the person stays in that house, the happier he or she should be. But as time passes, they will find that they are still not free from suffering. Although they live in a luxurious house, they still experience physical pain, mental anxiety, sickness, suffering, and so on.

Therefore, this shows that mundane happiness is not genuine happiness. If it were genuine happiness and the cause of genuine happiness, then living in a luxurious house should forever be the cause of happiness. Since it is not the cause of genuine happiness, it is the cause of mere temporary happiness, initially. As time passes, one's feelings change from happiness to suffering, and because this is so, mundane happiness is known as the suffering of change.

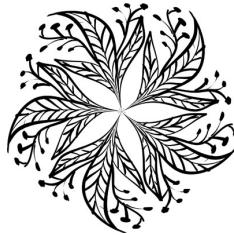
As we all know, neither wealth nor living in a luxurious home is the cause of happiness. We can easily say that the world's richest person is not the world's happiest person. There are many rich people going through difficult legal issues, in addition to other problems and challenges. This means that wealth is not the cause of happiness.

Neither is fame the cause of happiness. There are many famous people who are sick or have other problems like insomnia and have to take sleeping pills to go to sleep. It clearly shows that wealth and fame are not the causes of genuine everlasting happiness.

Such happiness is mundane.

Striving to gain mundane happiness is a sign that one is not a genuine Dharma practitioner. Genuine Dharma practitioners should have higher goals than achieving happiness in this life alone.

As I said before, wealth and fame are not the causes of happiness. We can also say that material development is not a genuine cause of happiness. In the last few decades there has been a lot of improvement in the material external world. But people are not happier today than several decades or centuries ago. This clearly demonstrates that the real cause of happiness does not come from the external world. The real cause of happiness is within our own mind, and to attain it we must subdue our own mind.



Notes:

(1) The five paths are the paths of accumulation, application, seeing, meditation, and no more learning. In the Mahāyāna, these paths are the approach to liberation resulting in complete buddhahood. The types of happiness experienced on these paths are explained later in this teaching.

## **Virtuous Deeds and Dharma Practice Are the Genuine Cause of Happiness**

**T**he best way to subdue or tame our own mind is to practice the pure Dharma, and to engage in virtuous deeds. The real cause of happiness is virtuous deeds, especially Dharma practice. By doing this, we can gain more and more happiness. For example, if two people face the same problem but one knows how to apply Dharma to the problem and the other does not, then mentally they will experience different feelings. The person who uses the methods taught in the Dharma to face the problem has less suffering than the person who does not know how to apply the teaching. Therefore, we should practice the Buddha Dharma.

In order to practice the Buddha Dharma, first it is important to know the meaning of the Dharma. Just having an intellectual understanding of the Dharma will not yield happiness. To gain happiness, not only do we need to have intellectual understanding of the Dharma, we also need to put it into action. We need to apply the teachings and an inner understanding of the Dharma in our daily life.

Dharma practice means the practice of Buddha's teaching

motivated by bodhicitta or enlightenment mind. This is Dharma practice because it leads us from suffering and dissatisfaction to temporary and ultimate happiness. This is the practice by which we will ultimately reach liberation and buddhahood, for the sake of all sentient beings. This practice is the real antidote that removes and eradicates the obscurations of our mental continuum. If our practice is not aiming toward buddhahood, then it is not real Dharma practice.

A guru was once asked what would happen if someone practiced Dharma with the aim of gaining happiness in this life. The guru replied that such an action would become a mundane action. The disciple further asked about the consequences of mundane action. The guru answered that mundane action results in experiencing the sufferings of the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm, and the animal realm.

Being a Dharma practitioner is not just about the external practice of the Buddha's teachings. To become a Dharma practitioner, we must also practice with the right motivation. As the great Ārya Mañjuśrī said in *Parting from the Four Attachments*, "If you have attachment to this life, you are not a Dharmic person." So if you have attachment to this life, no matter how many of the Buddha's teachings you practice, you still are not a spiritual person. Therefore, it is not only important to practice Dharma, but it is important to practice it with the right motivation.

A real Dharma practitioner is one who has two things together: the Dharma teaching and the highest motivation or

bodhicitta. Dharma practice means undertaking these two together. If you practice the Dharma with the motivation of bodhicitta then it becomes genuine Dharma practice and one becomes a genuine Dharma practitioner. Such practice is the real cause of happiness. It is the cause of both temporary happiness and ultimate happiness—which is itself the cause of buddhahood. Therefore, it is very important to understand what genuine Dharma practice is.

It is easy to deceive ourselves. After receiving many Dharma teachings, after doing many pujas and practices, and after studying Dharma teachings for many years, one may think, “Now I have done a lot of Dharma practice.” We can deceive ourselves because whether all these activities are real Dharma practice depends on one’s motivation. If one hasn’t developed or cultivated the right motivation, or has inferior motivation—even after many years of practice—then it is actually not Dharma practice. This is a type of ignorance through self-deception. One is deceived by not knowing the genuine meaning of Dharma practice.

It is important to be vigilant, mindful, and alert and to know what real Dharma practice is, especially after knowing how one can be deceived by ignorance. Knowing this, we should put forth effort to make our Dharma practice genuine Dharma practice.

To make our Dharma practice genuine, we need to apply effort to develop the right motivation. Having the right motivation is very important. Dharma practice that is motivated by right motivation is the cause of buddhahood whereas Dharma

practice that is not motivated by right motivation is not the cause of buddhahood. This is one of the reasons why motivation is very important. We must apply effort to gain real happiness by doing genuine Dharma practice.

As I explained earlier, happiness has many different levels. Likewise, suffering has many different levels. The greatest suffering is in the hell realm. As human beings, we think that living through an economic crisis is very difficult. But compared to beings in the hell or hungry ghost realms, our difficulty is not so bad. Generally speaking, as long as we are in saṃsāra, we will always experience difficult times. We are bound by negative actions and mental defilements. As long as we are bound by them, we are not free from suffering. And as long as we are not free from suffering, we will always experience difficulties. Therefore, we must always practice and always make efforts to gain genuine happiness until we reach buddhahood. Practice is the real cause of ultimate happiness.

On the path, there is happiness but it is not ultimate happiness. Ultimate happiness is the state of buddhahood. We can divide happiness into two types: 1) contaminated happiness, and, 2) uncontaminated happiness.

The happiness we experience on the non-Buddhist path, and on the first two of the five paths of a Mahāyāna Buddhist, is called contaminated happiness. The first two are the ordinary section of the path; they are the path of accumulation and the path of application. The next three are called the noble path.<sup>2</sup> They are the path of seeing, the path of meditation, and the path

of no more learning. Happiness on the noble path is known as uncontaminated happiness. Within both contaminated and uncontaminated happiness there are many different levels of happiness. The highest or the ultimate happiness is the state of buddhahood.

As I explained, to gain happiness, one needs to practice the Buddha Dharma. What kind of practice does one need to do? There are many different Dharma practices. But whatever practice one does, it is first very important to have the right motivation. Motivation means to first develop renunciation thought towards the whole of saṃsāra. It is not enough to have renunciation thought towards becoming a hell being or hungry ghost. We need to have renunciation thought towards the whole of saṃsāra, not just towards the three lower realms but also towards the three higher realms. To generate this renunciation thought it is important to know about suffering.



Notes:

(2) The noble path is that of the bodhisattvas beginning with the first bhūmi and resulting in complete buddhahood.

## Renouncing Suffering

**W**hat is suffering? If examined carefully, the nature of the whole of saṃsāra is suffering. For example, there are many different countries in this world, some developed and some underdeveloped. Nonetheless, there is not a single country in the world where one experiences only happiness or where one will never find suffering. This clearly shows that the nature of this whole world is suffering. Likewise, the nature of every corner of saṃsāra is suffering. It therefore is very important to know suffering as it is.

No one wants to experience suffering, but experiencing, recognizing, and knowing about suffering can cause us to develop important qualities. For example, by recognizing suffering as it is, pride is removed, and that can cause us to hesitate to engage in negative actions precisely because we do not want to suffer. If we do not want to experience suffering, then we need to avoid the causes of suffering.

For example, to eradicate a poison tree, you need to remove the root of the tree completely. Cutting off the branches or leaves will not eradicate the poisonous tree. Likewise, to



eradicate suffering, you need to eradicate the cause of suffering, which is negative action. By avoiding the cause of suffering which is nonvirtue, you will engage in the cause of happiness, which is virtuous deeds and Dharma practice.

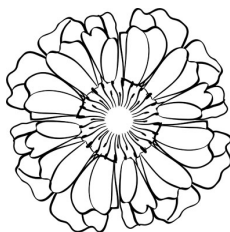
By recognizing suffering as it is, you will feel compassion towards other sentient beings, who are experiencing the suffering of saṃsāra like yourself. Recognizing suffering in this way causes us to avoid negative actions and to joyfully engage in the performance of virtuous deeds and to cultivate genuine happiness that can extend to all beings without exception. Therefore, it is very important to know about suffering.

When Lord Buddha Shakyamuni first turned the wheel of Dharma to five fortunate disciples, he taught the four noble truths. At that time Buddha taught that one needs to know the truth of suffering, abandon the origin or cause of suffering, and so on. Therefore, first it is very important to know the suffering of saṃsāra.

The minds of beings in the god realms are distracted by mundane happiness and therefore they cannot generate the intuition to practice the Dharma because they do not experience gross suffering or great suffering. Although god beings have some suffering, it is not great suffering and they are distracted by pleasures. They do not recognize suffering as it is, and they do not recognize the suffering of the whole of saṃsāra. We as human beings can recognize the suffering of the whole saṃsāra, not just in a few countries or just in this world alone.

Through the Dharma teachings, we as human beings can understand that the nature of the whole of saṃsāra is suffering. Ideally speaking, by knowing this it is easy to remove attachment to saṃsāra because having attachment to saṃsāra is like having attachment to suffering because the nature of saṃsāra is suffering. But at the moment it is not easy because we have attachment due to our past negative actions and defilements. We should try our best then to give rise to thoughts that help us remove attachment to saṃsāra. When we first begin, these thoughts will give rise to unattachment for only a short time, but as we progress, this perception will last much longer.

When we see the suffering of saṃsāra, then we will not have attachment. When we do not have attachment to saṃsāra, then it is easy to cultivate the wish to achieve liberation from saṃsāra. Such a wish is called renunciation thought. Although renunciation thought is not easy to develop at the beginning and sustain over a long period of time, one should attempt to develop it for short periods and then try to extend it. Eventually it is possible to continuously have this renunciation thought.



## Developing Loving-Kindness and Compassion

Once we have developed renunciation thought, we can genuinely receive refuge and bodhicitta vows. By genuinely receiving these two vows, we become first a Buddhist, and then a Mahāyāna Buddhist. Receiving the refuge vow makes one a Buddhist. Receiving and developing the bodhisattva vow makes one a Mahāyāna Buddhist.

As I said before concerning Dharma teachings and practices, if one receives the refuge vow or the bodhisattva vow without proper motivation or with inferior motivation, one does not have genuine refuge or bodhicitta vows. If the vow is not genuine, one is not converted from a non-Buddhist to Buddhist and also one cannot become a Mahāyāna Buddhist. To become a Mahāyāna Buddhist, not only do we need to receive the refuge and bodhisattva vows, but we also must have renunciation thought towards saṃsāra with the right intention. If these are taken all together, then one becomes a genuine Mahāyāna Buddhist.

Based on renunciation thought, one should develop loving-kindness and compassion.

In actuality, the real root of suffering in saṃsāra is selfish thought or ego clinging. The cause of suffering is due to negative actions. The cause of negative actions is defilements. The root of defilements is selfish thoughts. Therefore, this selfish thought is the root of all suffering and problems.



This selfish thought has two antidotes. One antidote is to suppress the defilements, while the other antidote is to eradicate them. The antidote that suppresses the defilements is loving-kindness and compassion. We are not talking about the limited loving-kindness and compassion that we extend to our family and friends. Rather, infinite loving-kindness and compassion that extends to all sentient beings without exception.

This infinite loving-kindness and compassion is Mahāyāna loving-kindness and compassion.

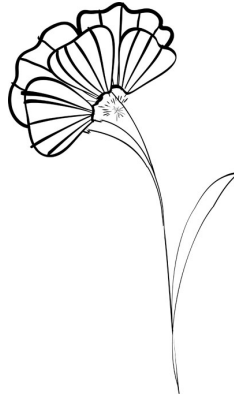
Sentient beings include not only human beings but all sentient beings in the six realms of saṃsāra who are bound by negative actions and obscurations. Infinite loving-kindness is the wish that all sentient beings gain happiness and the cause of happiness, which is Dharma practice or virtuous deeds. Infinite compassion is the wish that all beings be free from suffering and the cause of suffering, which is negative actions. It is not difficult to understand the meaning of infinite loving-kindness and compassion. Yet it is challenging for us to put these two into practice in our daily life.

We should not have a mere intellectual understanding of these two thoughts but should materialize them in our daily life. We must recall them again and again so that finally we can practice them constantly toward all beings. At the moment we are unable to apply infinite loving-kindness and compassion anywhere and anytime to every being. But we should try hard to accustom ourselves to both practices.

As a beginner, we should initiate the practices by meditating on loving-kindness and compassion toward all sentient beings, and then develop bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the strong wish to gain buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings and for this purpose one engages in the practice of Buddha Dharma. Through Dharma practice, one can eventually gain the highest result.

There are many types of Dharma practices. In the Mahāyāna tradition, the main practice is the six perfections. By practicing the Dharma teachings purely, authentically, and genuinely, finally we can gain perfect buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

-The End-







■ His Holiness the 42<sup>nd</sup> Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, belongs to the prestigious Khön family, whose successive generations have provided an unbroken lineage of outstanding masters, is the eldest son of His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (the 41<sup>st</sup> Sakya Trizin). Since young, he received many Dharma teachings, empowerments, pith instructions, oral transmissions, and etc. from H.H. the Sakya Trichen and many of the foremost masters and scholars of this age. When he was 12, he completed the Vajrapani retreat, and in 2005 gave the first *Lam Dre*—“Path with the Result” teaching, the highest teachings within the Sakya Order. Renowned for his erudition and the clarity of his teachings, H.H. the 42<sup>nd</sup> Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche is considered as one of the most highly qualified lineage masters of Tibetan Buddhism.



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