



Sarvavid Mahāvairocana Ritual: Saving Beings from All Bad Destinies

H.H. the Sakya Trichen (the 41st Sakya Trizin)



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www.sakyatradition.org

Email : info@sakyatradition.org

Wechat ID : TheSakyaTradition

Weibo : sakyatradition

IG: the_sakya_tradition

Facebook: TheSakya

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Acknowledgement

His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (the 41st Sakya Trizin) gave this teaching about the Sarvavid Mahāvairocana ritual at the request of the Singapore Buddha Sasana Society (Sakya Tenphel Ling) in August 2013. This ritual is derived from the *Sarvadurgati Parisodhana Tantra* (Tantra on the Complete Purification of All Bad Destinies). Buddha Shakyamuni taught this tantra to save a being who was reborn in hell. Sarvavid Mahāvairocana, the All-Knowing Great Illuminator (Tib. Kunrig Nampar Nangdzé Chenpo), is the main deity of this tantra and its practices. The Mahāvairocana ritual is performed annually at Sakya Centre, India, and at other monasteries for the benefit of countless beings.

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By the merit of this work, may His Holiness the Sakya Trichen enjoy perfect health and a very long life, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.

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Mahāvairocana

Introduction

Whether or not you are a believer or a Buddhist, each one of us wishes to be free from suffering and to achieve happiness. In pursuit of happiness, everyone undertakes many efforts and runs after things—one after another. For the sake of happiness, we have made tremendous progress in the last century, such as in the fields of science and technology. This progress, of course, has produced many benefits, especially in medicine; many diseases that were impossible to cure now can be easily cured. Moreover, many places that previously could not be reached now can be easily reached. Likewise, our progress in transportation and communication has benefited many. Yet, it is apparent that we cannot find real, lasting happiness through outer material progress alone.

Without inner spiritual progress, we cannot find real happiness. Although outer material progress has many benefits, it can cause great distraction and suffering. So, it is important to make inner spiritual progress at the same time as outer material progress. Then we can find real peace and happiness. Inner spiritual progress means

to follow the Dharma path taught by Buddha. As Buddhists, the main reason for us to follow the path is to attain ultimate enlightenment.

Buddha said that every sentient being has buddha nature. This means that every sentient being can become a fully enlightened buddha if they meet and practice the right methods. In this way, Buddha was the first person who truly recognized everyone as equal. Irrespective of their social status, wealth, race, or gender, everyone has the same buddha nature. All beings, including animals, have this same potential to become a buddha. Therefore, practicing Dharma is so important.

Buddha bestowed many different levels of teachings, but the Vajrayāna teachings are superior. In the general Mahāyāna path known as the Pāramitāyāna, even those practitioners with superior wisdom and diligence will take three countless eons to attain full enlightenment. But in the Vajrayāna, especially the highest level of tantra, superior practitioners can attain enlightenment in one lifetime, which is extremely fast. Mediocre practitioners can attain enlightenment at the time of death or in the bardo, which is the intermediate state between death and rebirth. Inferior practitioners—who have received empowerment and not committed downfalls—can attain enlightenment in seven lifetimes. And very inferior practitioners, who have kept the vows after receiving empowerment, can attain enlightenment in sixteen lifetimes. The path for each type of Vajrayāna practitioner is so much shorter than three countless eons.

In the Vajrayāna, grand rituals are performed for the benefit of beings; these rituals are important practices. Although the Mahāvairocana ritual is not from the highest tantra, it is derived from the *Sarvadurgati Parīśodhana Tantra* (Tantra on the Complete Purification of All Bad Destinies). Among the four classes of tantra, this tantra is included in the third (i.e., second highest) class.

Many fear that, in their next life, they might fall into the lower realms of hell, hungry ghosts, or animals—where there is unimaginable suffering. So, there is an urgent need to save sentient beings from falling into the lower realms. The Mahāvairocana ritual is especially known for its power to save both the living and deceased from bad destinies. When we die, no matter how powerful or rich or wise we are, none of these things can help us. Against our wishes, we must leave everything behind—our dear ones, our possessions, and even our body. The mental consciousness must travel alone to an unknown destination. Because that moment of death is so critical, spiritual help is extremely necessary.

I will now explain the history of the Mahāvairocana ritual, to better understand its urgency and importance.

History of the Ritual and Its Purpose

Eons ago, an evil prince had very wrong views. To usurp the throne and become the king, he killed his father. And his action caused his mother, overwhelmed with sorrow, to die. He was thus responsible for the death of both his parents. One day after becoming the king, he was traveling in a jungle. There, he met an arhat who appeared to be suffering due to lack of food, attacks from wild animals, and exposure to the sun, wind, and rain.

The king asked the arhat why he was subjecting himself to this suffering. The king offered for the arhat to come to his palace, where he could enjoy all sorts of facilities and comfort.

The arhat replied:

Although I am suffering now, soon I will attain nirvāṇa. Then I will never again hear even the word ‘suffering.’ I will enjoy only everlasting peace and happiness. Although you are a king enjoying life now, you will fall into the lower realms in your next life, since you are responsible for the death of both your parents. Then you will not hear even the word ‘happiness.’ You will experience only immense suffering for eons.

Afraid, the king asked how he could be saved. The arhat instructed the king to go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha for him to have any chance. So, the king took refuge in the Triple Gem and was temporarily saved. Instead of immediately falling into the lower realms, he was reborn in the heavenly realm as a god's son. He was named Vimalamañiprabha (Tib. Norbu Drimamepa'i Öd). But due to his heavy negative karma, he died very young.

At that time, Buddha was visiting the heavenly realm. The god Indra asked Buddha about where his son was born and his current condition. Buddha then explained to Indra that his son was reborn in the lowest hell realm due to his past negative actions and would be continuously born in the other hell realms for many lifetimes. Then he would be reborn in the hungry ghost realm and then in the animal realm. After many lifetimes, he would be reborn as a human but would be blind, deaf, and dumb. He would endure immense suffering.

Shocked, Indra fainted. Due to Buddha's blessing of sprinkling water on him, Indra was then revived. Because Buddha has infinite wisdom, compassion, and power, Indra requested him to bestow a method to save his precious son.

Buddha bestowed this tantra specifically to save sentient beings from negative karma that causes them to fall into the lower realms. He emitted many light rays to save beings. Through the power of Buddha's blessing and this tantra, someone who would otherwise suffer for eons can be instantly saved.

So once again, the former king was born in the heavenly realm. Impressed by the great power of Buddha and this tantra, he recited verses in praise of Buddha's great activities that save beings from the lower realms instantly and miraculously. In appreciation for Buddha's kindness, he offered his own ornaments like his crown, earrings, and necklace. Among the offerings in the Mahāvairocana ritual, there is a symbolic offering of crowns and so on, which is linked to the story in this tantra.

This tantra was brought from India to Tibet in early times. It was then transmitted to Sachen Kunga Nyingpo and has been passed down from teacher to student to the current time. The Mahāvairocana ritual is one of the main practices in our tradition. Although all the teachings are equally important, this ritual has been continuously and deeply practiced for centuries, so it has special blessings.

Efficacy of the Ritual to Overcome Suffering and Fear

Our own experience shows us that this ritual is powerful. When persons are very sick in great pain and agony, it is uncertain if they will survive. If the ritual is performed and the initiation is given to them, then those who can survive quickly recover. But if there is no chance, they pass away right after receiving the initiation rather than further endure their current illness. So, we know this ritual has great blessing and power.

It is certain that anyone who is born will die. There is no doubt about it. Not a single person who was born did not or will not die. Regardless of our wishes, we will face death. And when we die, we go through a critical time. There are two types of beings who do not experience the bardo. First, very superior practitioners—through their phowa practice—can transfer their consciousness directly to the buddha fields. Second, those with heavy negative karma do not experience the bardo. Instead, right after death, they fall directly into the lower realms. Except in these two extreme cases, the consciousness of most beings will leave their body after death and enter the bardo.

In the bardo, beings lack a physical body because they have no parents. Therefore, a bardo being has only a mental body. This mental body has no organs per se but can still hear, see, and smell. This state causes them great fear and anxiety. With no certainty, the mental body is just like a feather blown around by wind. Wherever the wind of karma blows, it goes there. Since it has no physical body, it travels very fast. It can even travel through walls and mountains. The places where the mental body will go are completely uncertain. Sometimes those places are very beautiful, sometimes they are very fearful, and sometimes they are very ugly. Moreover, there is uncertainty as to companions and food.

Since bardo beings lack a solid body, they cannot eat solid food but can smell food to have some satisfaction. Sometimes food smells like nectar; other times though, it smells like awful burning iron. So, there is complete uncertainty of food.

Because bardo beings have great fear and anxiety, they have an uncertainty of refuge too. They are unsure about from whom they can seek help. Due to this, there is uncertainty of thoughts. Virtuous, non-virtuous, and indifferent thoughts constantly arise for them. Their mental consciousness goes everywhere instantly and constantly.

Without a physical body, bardo beings have no white or red elements inside their bodies. Due to this, there is no sun or moon outside; they cannot see the sun or moon. Also, bardo

beings have no shadows, fingerprints, or physical impressions. Their mind is subtler than our mind, so they have a level of contaminated clairvoyance; bardo beings can read the minds of others. As such, it is important for us living beings to generate loving-kindness, compassion, and kind thoughts for the deceased. Otherwise, since bardo beings can read our mind, our negative thoughts can cause them great pain, anxiety, and anger—which is very harmful for them.

Bardo beings experience death and rebirth every week. They also have varied lifespans. Some spend a brief time in the bardo, while others remain in the bardo for eons. On average though, beings remain in bardo for seven weeks or forty-nine days. During the first four weeks, bardo beings experience the appearances and propensities of their immediate past life. The fourth week is the turning point. After that, appearances resemble their next life. After the seventh week, most bardo beings are born in one of the six realms of saṃsāra.

Bardo beings experience seven fearful conditions. The first four are terrifying sounds of the four elements. When the earth element absorbs into the water element, there is a sound of whole maintains cracking apart. When the water element absorbs into the fire element, there is a sound like the terrible shaking of all the oceans. When the fire element absorbs into the wind element, there is a sound like the great fire at an eon's end. And when the wind element dissolves into the consciousness, there is a very terrifying, loud sound of wind, just like the windstorm at

an eon's end. Also, three terrifying cliffs of the three lower realms are experienced. They have edges of knives that are very fine and steep, for thousands of miles downward. These cliffs are the manifestation of one's own three defilements—desire, aversion, and ignorance.

When beings have these fears, it is important to perform rituals such as Mahāvairocana to give them great blessings and to relieve them of suffering. In general, a living being's mind when dreaming is seven times subtler than when awake. For bardo beings, their mind is seven times subtler than a living being's mind when dreaming. Since bardo beings are not bound by a physical body, if they meet the right methods, they can swiftly attain realization.

Conclusion

In Tibetan, this type of ritual is called a jangchog or purification ritual. We perform the ritual to purify negative deeds and specially to save beings from falling into the lower realms. If one falls into the lower realms, then there is not only tremendous suffering but also the duration of that bad destiny is extremely long. Therefore, this ritual is particularly helpful for the deceased.

We must recognize, as living persons, that eventually we also will experience death. So, while we are still healthy or young, it is important to practice Dharma very diligently.

-The End-



■ His Holiness the Sakya Trichen is revered as the forty-first throne holder of the Sakya lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Born in Tibet in 1945, His Holiness is from the noble Khön family, whose predecessors date to the early days of Tibetan history and established the Sakya order in the eleventh century. In his youth, His Holiness received intensive training in Buddhist philosophy, meditation, and ritual from eminent masters and scholars.

Widely regarded as an emanation of Mañjuśrī, His Holiness is the spiritual guide to many in the next generation of Buddhist teachers and practitioners, and has bestowed Sakya's core teaching cycle known as the Lamdre (the Path with the Result) in both eastern and western countries. His Holiness manifests profound wisdom and compassion, tirelessly working to establish monasteries, nunneries, and educational institutions and to impart the Buddha's teachings to countless students around the world.



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