



Right Motivation: The Seed of the Path

His Holiness the Sakya Trichen



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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.

Motivation is often hidden, but it quietly shapes the result of everything we do. The same action may become a cause of benefit, harm, or mere habit, depending on the intention behind it.

In this sense, motivation is like a seed: what grows from it cannot be separated from what was planted.

This teaching invites us to look honestly at that seed before we act, study, practice, or pursue any goal.



PREFACE

Right Motivation: The Seed of the Path

Before any teaching begins, the first and most important point is to have the right motivation. Whatever practice one does, and whatever teaching one receives, where it eventually leads depends upon one's initial motivation. Therefore, it is very important to have the right motivation.

If one has a negative motivation, such as desire, anger, jealousy, and so forth, then even receiving the teaching may become harmful. For example, one may think, "By receiving this teaching, I will become wealthy," which is associated with desire. Or one may think, "By receiving this teaching, I will become very learned, and I will compete with other masters," which is connected with anger and jealousy. If one has such motivation, it is like taking the wrong medicine: instead of curing the disease, it causes more harm.

If one has neither good nor bad motivation, but simply comes out of curiosity, merely to observe or to act as a spectator, this also has no real benefit.

However, if one has good motivation, then even hearing a single line of teaching has great benefit. Good motivation itself has different levels.

Some people receive teachings in order to overcome obstacles, gain longevity, wealth, prosperity, and so on. This is a good motivation, but it is for the sake of this life. As this teaching says at the very beginning, if one has attachment to this life, one is not a dharmic or religious person. Therefore, although this is a good motivation, it is still a worldly motivation and is not Dharma in the true sense. It is what is called worldly dharma.

Others receive teachings with the understanding that this life will not last forever. One day, we must leave this world, and no one knows where one will go after leaving it. Ordinary people do not know.

Many people do not believe in life after this one. However, according to the teachings, although the body will be disposed of in one way or another, the mind cannot be disposed of in the same way as the body. Therefore, the mind must enter another life.

At that time, the negative deeds we have committed will cause us to fall into what are called the lower realms. The virtuous deeds

we have committed will cause us to be born in the higher realms. If one falls into the lower realms, there is immense suffering.

No one wants suffering. Everyone is afraid of suffering. Therefore, out of fear of the suffering of the lower realms, and with the wish to be continuously born in the higher realms, one may receive teachings. This is a good motivation. However, although it is not attached to this life, it is still attached to saṃsāra. Therefore, it is known as the small person's path.

Then there are those who think that not only are the lower realms full of suffering, but even in the higher realms there is no certainty. Nothing lasts forever. Even if one becomes the lord of the heavens, that state does not last forever. One day it will come to an end.

Therefore, in the entirety of saṃsāra, no matter where one is born, there is not a single place worthy of attachment. For this reason, one wishes to renounce all of saṃsāra, whether in the lower or higher realms, and to seek nirvāṇa: one's own liberation, permanent freedom from all forms of suffering, and the attainment of everlasting peace.

This is, of course, very good. However, it is not the best motivation. Therefore, it is called the mediocre person's path.

Then one understands that not only is the entirety of saṃsāra full of suffering, but just as one wishes to be free from suffering and to find peace, every sentient being, whether believer or non-believer, has the same feeling.

We believe in rebirth. This is not the only life we have had. We have had innumerable lifetimes in the past, and we will also have innumerable lives in the future.

Therefore, every single sentient being, is actually very closely connected with us and very dear to us, having become our father, mother, brother, sister, and so on. For this reason, it is not right to think only of oneself, because they have given us so much. Each time they have become our parents, relatives, and so on, they have given us so much love and so much benefit.

However, due to the change from one life to another, we do not recognize one another. We see some beings as enemies, some as friends, and some with indifference. Yet in reality, every single sentient being, including even our most hated enemies, has been our very dear mother, our very dear brothers, and so on.

Therefore, it is not right to seek liberation for oneself alone. For the sake of freeing all sentient beings from suffering and leading them to the path of happiness, one seeks enlightenment.

This is the greatest motivation. Therefore, it is called the great person's path. As Mahāyāna practitioners, one should have this motivation.

In every practice one does, the ultimate goal is to attain full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Therefore, one must have this motivation. When one has such a great motivation, then all other aims, such as overcoming obstacles, gaining long life, good health, and so on, become very minor matters. They are automatically accomplished.

This is what is called non-abiding nirvāṇa, which means being free from, or not residing in, the two extremes. There are two extremes.

One extreme is saṃsāra, which is full of suffering. The other extreme is nirvāṇa, where there is no suffering, but it is inactive and does not allow one to develop one's full qualities. Because of this, one also cannot benefit others very much.

These are the two extremes. Enlightenment is beyond both of these extremes. Therefore, it is called non-residing, because it does not reside in either of the two extremes. It is beyond both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and is also known as great nirvāṇa.

With such a great motivation, one should also have the proper conduct: physically sitting in a respectful manner, verbally remaining silent, and mentally receiving the precious teachings with great interest and joy. After receiving these teachings, one should diligently follow and practice whatever one has learned.



■ 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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