



Teaching on the Seven-Limb Prayer

H.H. the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche



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The Right Motivation and the Right Reason

First, as always, it is important to have the right motivation and intention. Why do we have to learn or study? Why do we have to receive the teaching? We should have good reasons to learn or study. If we just learn Dharma out of curiosity, then it is not right. And if we learn Dharma merely to gain knowledge, but not to practice, this is also not right.

Dharma is the teachings that we need to study, and after that we need to practice, and then we need to experience. If we can experience the Dharma, this means we have gained realization or the inner qualities from learning and practicing the Dharma. Therefore, first it is important to have the right motivation and the right reason to study.

Developing the Thought of Renunciation

To have the right motivation, first we need to develop the thought of renunciation toward the whole saṃsāra. It is very important to have the right motivation, because Lord Buddha has given an enormous number of teachings to suit the different mentalities of sentient beings, to lead us to be free from suffering or dissatisfaction to both temporary and ultimate happiness. So, the purpose for all these teachings given by the Buddha is to gain liberation and to attain enlightenment. Buddha has never given any teaching for us just to remain in saṃsāra, for the purpose of this life, or for us to gain higher rebirth in our next life. In other words, Buddha has never given any teaching for us just to gain a result within saṃsāra. Rather, Buddha has given teachings in order to liberate us from saṃsāra. If we as followers are practicing the Dharma merely to gain mundane results such as long life, good health, prosperity in this life, or just to gain a higher rebirth, then this indicates that our motivation, goal, and purpose of practicing the Dharma are not the same as the Buddha's. Such motivation is against the wishes of the Buddha.

As the followers of Buddha, we must practice Dharma and engage in dharmic activities with the thought of renunciation toward the whole saṃsāra. In other words, those who do not wish to gain liberation from saṃsāra—those who really want to stay in this saṃsāra forever—will not become a genuine Buddhist, a follower of the Buddha.

It is said in the teaching, “The precious and profound Dharma is too valuable to be used for this life alone; these sacred teachings of Lord Buddha are too valuable to be used for higher rebirth alone.” Therefore, the thought of renunciation is especially important for all of us—Buddhists—to develop, and thus first, we have this renunciation thought before engaging in any practice.

Reflecting on Suffering

In this world, there are many different countries with many kinds of people, races, cultures, religions, and so on. Some countries are more developed while some are less developed. Yet wherever we go, we will not find a place where there is no suffering. In fact, we all are experiencing suffering. For example, when we move from a poor underdeveloped country where resources are lacking to a rich developed country with great infrastructures such as excellent roads, abundant supplies of electricity and clean water, then, although we may have overcome certain difficulties in our basic living requirements, we still experience physical pain, mental suffering, and stress. This clearly shows that a material world alone will not give us real happiness and will not overcome suffering that we really need to be free from.

We can say the whole world is in the nature of suffering because no one in this world is free from suffering. All ordinary human

beings who are born in this world out of their own negative actions and emotions, do experience suffering. But of course, in this world there are many great masters who are not caught up by negative emotions and actions. They came here just for us—to help, guide, rescue, and protect us. They are here not because of their negative karma and emotions but are here due to their loving-kindness and compassion to help sentient beings.

So, when I say, “all are suffering,” I am referring to “all ordinary human beings who are caught up in saṃsāra due to their negative emotions experience suffering.” All ordinary beings are experiencing suffering; although some have less suffering while some have more; overall, all are experiencing suffering. Moreover, we cannot claim the richest person in this world is the happiest person; we cannot claim that the most famous person is the happiest in this world; we cannot say the most powerful person is the happiest in this world. Hence it clearly shows that power, fame, and wealth are not the real cause of happiness. Through this way, we can understand that the whole saṃsāra is in the nature of suffering. If we know this, then it is easier for us to abandon the attachment to saṃsāra. When we do not have attachments, then it is easier for us to develop the genuine wish to gain liberation from the whole saṃsāra, and such a wish is called “the thought of renunciation.”

Infinite Loving-Kindness and Compassion

Next, based on the understanding of suffering, we need to develop infinite loving-kindness, which means wishing all sentient beings to gain happiness and to engage in virtuous deeds—that is, to engage in Dharma practices that are the cause of happiness. And then we need to develop infinite compassion, which means wishing all sentient beings to be free from suffering and to be free from engaging in negative actions that are the cause of suffering. So, loving-kindness and compassion are especially important, which are fundamental practices of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition.

To practice loving-kindness and compassion genuinely, first it is important for us to know to whom we need to develop these two thoughts. All human beings, even animals, do give a certain amount of loving-kindness and compassion to their dear ones. But that is not enough. What we really need is limitless loving-kindness and compassion, which means our object is limitless. Because of this, the subject or thought is also known as “limitless loving-kindness and compassion.”

When we practice Dharma, we are not practicing Dharma for oneself alone, neither are we practicing for a few people nor for all the Buddhist followers only. Rather we are practicing Dharma

for all beings—including all human beings in this world, all the animals, and all the beings of the six realms in this saṃsāra. So, our goal is vast and our object is limitless, because we extend our loving-kindness and compassion to all sentient beings without any exception or discrimination.

If we really practice infinite loving-kindness and compassion, then we will not have biased thoughts, such as “I like this person” and “I do not like that person” toward all sentient beings. If we have these two kinds of thoughts—like and dislike—it means our thoughts are biased and limited. As such, we cannot extend loving-kindness and compassion to all beings. If we really can practice infinite loving-kindness and compassion to all beings, then naturally we will not hate anyone based on different religions, races, nationalities, and so on. Instead, we will have love and compassion toward all, irrespective of their religion, race, nationality, culture, language, and so on.

It is taught that the practice of compassion is a universal religion. Many talk about compassion. It is important for us to emphasize the practice of loving-kindness and compassion. Because without these two fundamental practices, we cannot develop the enlightened mind, bodhicitta, which is the key practice of the Mahāyāna tradition. There is no Mahāyāna practice without bodhicitta, and there is no bodhicitta practice without loving-kindness

and compassion to all. Therefore, first it is important to develop loving-kindness and compassion for all beings.

It is not enough to know the meaning of loving-kindness and compassion; after having the intellectual understanding of these two thoughts, we need to apply these teachings and understanding in our daily lives. We must implement these teachings in our actions. The more we practice and meditate on these two thoughts, the more loving-kindness and compassion we will develop. Therefore, we need to practice these thoughts every day, again and again, until we can extend our loving-kindness and compassion to all sentient beings all the time, without any exception.

Bodhicitta

Based on these two positive thoughts, we need to develop bodhicitta, the enlightened mind. Bodhicitta is categorized into relative bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta. As mentioned earlier, this enlightened mind is especially important for all Mahāyāna practices. There is no Mahāyāna practice without bodhicitta. So bodhicitta is like a wish-fulfilling jewel; bodhicitta is like our guidance that will lead us to gain liberation from saṃsāra, and eventually to attain buddhahood. According to the Mahāyāna tradition, without bodhicitta, we will not gain liberation and will not gain attainment of buddhahood. So bodhicitta is especially important.

The purpose of attaining the enlightenment state is neither for oneself nor for a few beings, but for all sentient beings. In fact, it is mentioned in the teachings that space has no limit, and so likewise, sentient beings also have no limit. All these limitless sentient beings have been our close ones or our dear parents in this lifetime or in our past lives. We can say this because we were born in this saṃsāra not only one time, but for infinite times.

Whenever we were born, we did not have the same parents again and again, and through this we can say all sentient beings have been our dear ones or our parents in this lifetime or in our past lives. Now it is time for us to repay their kindness! At this moment while we have this precious human life, we have the best opportunity to repay their great kindness. The way to repay them is not by giving them material gifts. In fact, it is impossible to give material things to all sentient beings, who are countless. There are not only seven billion people, but countless sentient beings.

The best way to repay their kindness is through Dharma practice, which is a mental practice. By developing and practicing bodhicitta we can repay their kindness. We must repay their kindness now, but currently we do not have the power to rescue all sentient beings from this ocean of saṃsāra. For example, if one does not know how to swim, then one will drown in the ocean.

If one drowns in the ocean, then one cannot save or rescue others who are also drowning in the ocean. Similarly, we are drowning in the ocean of saṃsāra; at present we do not have power to rescue others who are also drowning in saṃsāra. Not only do we as human beings not have the power, but others also do not have such power. Only buddhas have the full power to rescue beings from the ocean of saṃsāra. Therefore, we need to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. This is known as “wishing bodhicitta.”

We cannot attain buddhahood without causes and conditions; we cannot attain buddhahood with wrong causes or through incomplete causes; we need to attain buddhahood with the correct cause and through a complete cause. Complete cause means first we need to practice Dharma, so that we can repay the kindness of all sentient beings by developing such wishing bodhicitta, and then next is engaging bodhicitta, which means that to attain buddhahood, we are engaging in Dharma practices, as I have mentioned earlier. As a beginner, we must emphasize relative bodhicitta, which encompasses wishing bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta. Through these two bodhicitta practices, gradually and eventually we can develop ultimate bodhicitta, the direct insight into the absolute nature of things. With both relative bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta together—we can attain buddhahood.

In short, to have the right motivation, one has to develop the thought of renunciation, infinite loving-kindness and compassion, and wishing and engaging bodhicittas. With these in mind, we should receive the teaching. When you receive the teaching, it is important to know that the Buddha is like a skillful doctor, his teachings are like medicine, we ourselves are like the patient or sick person, and our anger, jealousy, attachment, ignorance, arrogance, pride, and so on are our sicknesses. Receiving and following the Buddha's teachings are like following the doctor's advice. With such perception, we need to practice Dharma.

All Buddhists need to practice Dharma by themselves. For example, when one is sick, one has to take medicine by themselves. If others take the medicine, it will not cure one's sickness. Similarly, to cure our sickness of negative thoughts, we need to take the medicine by ourselves. We need to practice the Dharma by ourselves. So it is important for all of us to practice Dharma.

Seven-Limb Prayer of the Samantabhadra Prayer

The Limb of Prostration

Today's teaching is on the seven-limb prayer. There are different kinds of seven-limb prayers, such as the ones that are used in initiations, which were taught by the Buddha in the tantras. There are the three main *Hevajra Tantras*: one is root tantra while the other two are commentary tantras. The two commentary tantras are known as *Sambhūta Tantra*, the common commentary tantra, and *Vajrapañjara Tantra*, the uncommon commentary tantra. The seven-limb prayer used in initiations and empowerments is from the Hevajra uncommon commentary tantra, the *Vajrapañjara Tantra*. There is another seven-limb prayer that is explained in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* composed by Ācārya Śāntideva.

Today I am not going to talk on those seven-limb prayers. However, I am going to explain the seven-limb prayer of the Samantabhadra prayer, which is an aspiration prayer. The preliminary part of the Samantabhadra prayer contains this seven-limb prayer. The first six limbs are on the accumulation of merit.

The Limb of Prostration

The first limb is the limb of prostration. There are two aspects: the first is the general prostrations of body, speech, and mind, and the second aspect has three, where the prostrations of body, speech, and mind are separated.

To all the buddhas, the lions of human race,

In all directions of the universe, through past, present, and future:

To every single one of you, I bow in homage;

Devotion fills my body, speech, and mind.

In the text, it says we prostrate through our body, speech, and mind to all the buddhas. Here “buddhas” refers to not just one buddha, but all the buddhas of the ten directions. We need to visualize that we are prostrating to all the buddhas of the ten directions.

Who is prostrating? It is “I” who is prostrating. So, we should imagine that we are prostrating to all the buddhas of the ten directions. And how do we prostrate? We prostrate through our physical body, speech, and mind in a respectful manner to all the buddhas. This is the general prostrations without dividing body, speech, and mind, which is the first aspect of the first limb.

When performing prostrations even in our house or at a temple, to a buddha statue, thangka, or a picture of a buddha, we should think *This is a real buddha*. We should not think it is merely a symbol of a buddha, a statue, a thangka, or a picture. If we think this way, we will not accumulate great merit. Mentally we should think *This is a real buddha in a three-dimensional form and in the nature of light*. Whenever we visualize a buddha, we should not perceive this buddha as an ordinary human form, made up of flesh, bone, blood, and so on, like our body. Rather we should think that this buddha is in the nature of light, like a rainbow.

When seeing a rainbow, we can clearly see its many colors, but we cannot touch a rainbow with our hands. No matter how much effort we make in attempting to reach or hold the rainbow, it is just not possible. So, we should think that this is a real buddha whenever we prostrate to a statue or a thangka of a buddha. Further, we should not think that this is only one buddha; rather, we should think *This is the embodiment of all the buddhas, and we are prostrating to the buddhas in various forms*, or we can combine all forms of the buddhas in this one form and think *This is the combination of all the buddhas*. With such understanding and intention, we prostrate.

If we prostrate in such a manner, then it is more meritorious. There is a big difference between thinking that this is just a statue

and then prostrate versus thinking that this is a real buddha and prostrate. Thinking the buddha is just an image or a statue, we will not accumulate great merit, but if we think it is a real buddha, then we will gain great merit. Whether we can accumulate great merit not only depends on the object to which we prostrate, but also depends largely on our intention and motivation.

Through the power of this prayer, aspiring to Good Actions,

All the victorious ones appear, vivid here before my mind,

And I multiply my body as many times as atoms in the universe,

Each one bowing in prostration to all the buddhas.

The text then explains about the physical prostrations; here it means through the power of the Bhadracaryā prayer. “Bhadracaryā” means good action, good behavior, or good deeds. “Caryā” means behavior or attitude, “bhadra” means good or wholesome. Through the power of having sincere faith and devotion in the Samantabhadra prayer, or the Bhadracaryā prayer, then we need to control our negative emotions, such as not having faith in the Buddha. So, we should control our negative thoughts and emotions. And then we should think that all the buddhas in front of us are real and in the nature of light, and then we prostrate.

We do not have the fortune to see buddhas through our own eyes directly, but at the moment we should visualize that we are seeing buddhas with our own eyes directly. When doing physical prostrations, we should think that not only one body is doing prostrations; mentally we should multiply our physical body into countless bodies, or we should multiply our physical body as many times as there are atoms in the buddha field. This means “countless.” All these countless bodies are doing prostrations to all the buddhas.

It is taught that how much blessings we can receive by praying to the buddhas depends on our own thinking. If we think this is just a statue and pray, then in this case we will receive the blessing of a buddha statue, which is a small blessing, not a blessing of a real buddha, because mentally we are not praying to a real buddha. Whereas when seeing a statue, yet if we know this is a real buddha in a three-dimensional form, by praying to this buddha, then we can receive blessing of a real buddha.

In other words, how much blessing we receive through praying depends on how we perceive this object of prostrations. Therefore, it is important for all of us to think that the object we are prostrating to is a real buddha in the nature of light. While prostrating, we should multiply our physical body to be as many bodies as there are atoms in the buddhafield.

The seven-limb prayer is especially important to accumulate great merit. For instance, when we prostrate, our body covers a certain amount of ground; the more ground we cover, the more merit we gain. It is said in the sūtra that just saying the word “prostration” brings an unimaginable benefit. So, if we prostrate with sincere motivation and in a proper manner, then there is no doubt that through this practice, we can accumulate great merit.

In every atom preside as many buddhas as there are atoms,

And around them, all their bodhisattva heirs:

And so I imagine them filling

Completely the entire space of reality.

When we speak of “prostration,” we are usually referring to physical prostration. However, in this verse, it refers to mental prostration, which means that mentally we should think in a profound way. Actually, perceptions such as “big” and “small” are made by our thoughts; in reality, there are no thoughts like “big and small,” “spacious and narrow,” and so on—all these are not reality. Mentally we must think that on each atom, there are infinite buddhas, and the buddhafield, too, has infinite atoms, and hence there are infinite buddhas in the buddhafield. In short, we should think that the entire universe has countless atoms,

and each atom has infinite buddhas, and thus there are countless and countless buddhas. To all these buddhas, we must develop sincere faith and devotion, and this is mental prostration.

Saluting them with an endless ocean of praise,

With the sounds of an ocean of different melodies,

I sing of the buddhas' noble qualities,

And praise all those who have gone to perfect bliss.

Next is verbal prostration. With sincere devotion and right motivation, we visualize there are countless buddhas, we are offering praise to all these countless buddhas with great melodies, and we recite their infinite qualities. This is verbal prostration.

It is not possible to explain all the qualities of the buddhas because their qualities are infinite. For example, space has no limit; when birds fly in the sky, after a while, birds will land on the ground. When birds land on the ground, it does not mean that the space has been exhausted or there is no more space for the birds to fly. Rather, it means the energy of the birds has exhausted; that is why they stop flying and land on the ground or on trees. Similarly, no matter how great a scholar is, after explaining the buddhas' qualities for a while, one will conclude

the explanation on the buddhas' qualities. It does not mean one has explained all the qualities of the buddhas. Rather, it means that one only knows that much of the buddhas' qualities—one does not know more than that. That is why one needs to conclude one's talk on the buddhas' qualities. Although we cannot explain all the qualities of the buddhas, we can imagine that we are offering praise to the buddhas by talking about their qualities, which are infinite.

By performing prostrations, not only can we accumulate great merit, our general negative actions or faults, and in particular our pride or actions motivated by pride, such as thinking one is better or higher than the buddhas, can be purified, too.



When we prostrate, we should do so through our physical body, speech, and mind. If we just prostrate physically without the support of speech and mind, then we will not accumulate great merit. For example, if there are two people prostrating to the same buddha statue, one is prostrating with the right motivation and visualization, while the other is without right motivation and visualization, but with the goal of losing weight or regarding it as a fitness exercise. With such mundane intention, the latter will not accumulate great merit. Whether we can accumulate great merit through prostration normally does not depend on our physical prostration, but mainly depends on our mental prostration.

The Limb of Offering

The second limb is the limb of offering. There are two kinds of offerings: general and unsurpassable offerings. Actually, in the seven-limb prayer, an unsurpassable offering is more meritorious than a general offering. It is reflected in the order of the seven-limb prayer, for instance, the limb of offering is more meritorious than the limb of prostration.

i. General Offerings

General offerings refer to worldly objects, items that are available in this world.

To every buddha, I make offerings:

Of the loveliest flowers, of beautiful garlands,

Of music and perfumed ointments, the best of parasols,

The brightest lamps and finest incense.

Flowers: When we offer flowers, we should have the right motivation and we should also collect flowers that are never tainted by our negative actions. For example, if we steal flowers from others and offer them to the buddhas, this is not right because our action—stealing—is a negative action. We should therefore collect flowers without engaging in any wrongdoings from the beginning. Apart from stealing the offering object, if one steals money to buy the offering object, stealing is committed and thus the offering is also tainted. We should therefore collect the flowers without doing any wrong action from the beginning. Moreover, we should offer flowers without any flies or insects. We should offer the best and most beautifully decorated flowers in this world, such as flower garlands. We need to offer fresh flowers; freshness is important. As a human being, we prefer eating fresh food rather than leftovers. If we eat fresh food, but offer old flowers to the buddhas, then this is not right. It means we think more about ourselves than the buddhas. Actually, one needs to offer more to the buddhas than to oneself. If spending a lot of money on oneself, but not on the Dharma, offerings, and so on, then this means one is using one's wealth based on selfish thoughts. One needs to spend money in a meaningful manner by making offerings to the buddhas or helping sentient beings who really need help or protection.

Overall, we should offer sacred, fresh, fragrant, and excellent

flowers that are untainted by negative actions to the buddhas.

Music: One also offers music to the buddhas.

Scented water or perfumes: Long ago when I was in France, I heard that some perfume manufacturers were using animal substances as ingredients. These perfumes are not as pure and are not considered harmless, because during the process of manufacturing, animals were sacrificed and thus these perfumes are “contaminated.” One needs to offer pure perfumes, knowing that they are not tainted by any misdeeds.

One should not make offerings with any animal products. We should offer good things without any faults, such as water scented with sandalwood.

Parasols: One offers a parasol, a special and excellent umbrella with a golden handle that is adorned with jewel ornaments and a victory banner.

Lamps or Lights: We need to offer butter lamps, *āloke* in Sanskrit or marmé (མར་མེ།) in the Tibetan language, or lamp, snangsol (སྒྲུང་གསལ།) in the Tibetan language, which means “lights that illuminate others.” The brighter the lamp we offer, the more merit we can earn. The brightest objects in this world are the sun and moon. We need to offer bright lights: butter lamps, other

lights, the sun and moon. For example, for our own use when we are home at night, we prefer to turn on electric lights instead of using candles, because candles are not as bright as electric lights and cannot illuminate the surroundings as well. If we prefer electric lights, likewise, when making light offerings, we need to offer lights that are brighter, such as the sun, moon, or stars.

Mentally we can offer any objects, be they owned or not owned by others, because there is no barrier. If we offer the sun, moon, or stars, it does not mean that we are stealing them; rather, we are just mentally offering them to the buddhas, as they are not owned by anyone.

Incense: One can offer great incense to the buddhas too.

To every buddha, I make offerings:

Exquisite garments and the most fragrant scents,

Powdered incense, heaped as high as Mount Meru,

Arranged in perfect symmetry.

The objects of general offerings also include the three Dharma robes^[1], garments, excellent fragrances, or small cord bags filled with substances containing lovely fragrances. All of these are beautifully decorated.

ii. Unsurpassable Offerings

*Then the vast and unsurpassable offerings,
Inspired by my devotion to all the buddhas,
And moved by the power of my faith in Good Actions,
I prostrate and offer to all you victorious ones.*

Next, this is the seventh verse of the prayer that explains about unsurpassable offerings, which refer to offering objects that are beyond this world. Worldly objects are caused by our own karma and negative emotions. Unsurpassable offering objects are manifested by noble bodhisattvas through the power of their samādhi or meditation and prayers. Therefore, these unsurpassable offering objects are caused by untainted actions.

The last two lines of this verse “Moved by the power of my faith in Good Actions, I prostrate and offer to all you victorious ones” summarize the limbs of prostration and offering. Infinite offering substances with light-rays issue from the heart of Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, offering to all the buddhas in the ten directions. Here we develop sincere faith in such a great act of offering by Samantabhadra. Because of this power of faith, we visualize that our heart is issuing many offering objects, while making offerings and prostrating to all the buddhas.

For example, when we see a beautiful garden or beautiful flowers, at that time we can just visualize that we are mentally offering these flowers, whose beauty is owned by no one, to all the buddhas.

Notes:

[1] The three Dharma robes (Tib. ཚོས་གོས་རྒྱུ་གསུམ་ chögö nam sum) refer to (1) a large patched shawl made of 32 patches, usually yellow in the Tibetan tradition, worn only by fully ordained monks; (2) a large patched shawl, usually yellow in the Tibetan tradition, which can be worn by both fully ordained monks and novice monks; and (3) the lower robe of a fully ordained monk, sown in pieces.

The Limb of Confession

*Whatever negative acts I have committed,
While driven by desire, hatred, and ignorance,
With my body, my speech, and also with my mind,
Before you, I confess and purify each and every one.*

The eighth verse of this seven-limb prayer is the limb of confession. Confession means having strong regrets on all the negative actions that we have done, and thus one is making a strong promise not to repeat the same mistakes. Making promises will help to avoid engaging in these negative actions again. For instance, this morning I met with some people; one person made a promise to me by saying he would not drink alcohol. Making such a promise can help that person to avoid drinking in the future. I complimented him: “It is very good that you make a promise not to drink alcohol, and now you should keep this promise.”

In addition, when we confess, we should promise not to engage in negative actions again. Having engaged in negative actions, it is better for us to confess. If we do not hide our faults and the negative actions that we have done, then the power of the negative actions becomes lesser and weaker. On the other hand, if we are engaged in virtuous deeds, such as doing vigilant Dharma practice, then it is better for us to hide and not to disclose what we are doing, which will make our practice more powerful. But sometimes, certain masters may share, “I have done this and that” to encourage others and set an example for them. Otherwise, they would not disclose what they are doing.

For example, at this moment in this world, we have many great masters, but we do not know what practice they are doing; which deity they practice; which *sādhanā* they are doing every day, because they keep this a secret to make their practice more powerful. When masters are performing retreat, we do not know which deity they are practicing and what mantra they are reciting in their retreat. They will not tell others and there is no need to tell, anyway. Although there could be a few exceptions, generally speaking, great masters will not disclose such information on Dharma practices they do in everyday life. Keeping our practice secret can help us accumulate more merit and have powerful practice.

Here we need to confess negative actions that we have committed

through our body, speech, and mind, which are motivated by our three poisonous thoughts: ignorance, anger, and attachment. We have committed so many negative acts and most of the time we do not even know we have committed so many of them. Sometimes we do not realize the negative actions that we have committed are in fact negative actions. Therefore, we need to confess all our wrong deeds with strong regret. If we feel strong regret about our wrong deeds, which is also part of the confession practice, this will reduce the power of our wrong deeds. Feeling strong regret as though we have taken poison by mistake, then we need to make strong resolution to not repeat these mistakes.

When confessing our wrong deeds, we need the four powers. The first power is the power of the shrine, which means the object to whom we are going to confess our wrong deeds. Here at the beginning, we have already visualized all the buddhas, so this is the power of the shrine; this is the object to whom we are going to practice all these seven-limb prayers, including the present limb, which is the limb of confession. We are confessing all our negative acts in the presence of all the buddhas. The second power is the power of regret, which means to feel strong regret. The third power is the power of antidote, which means from now on, we will not repeat the same mistake in the future. The fourth power is the power of revival, which means through confession, we are convinced that our negative acts are purified.

With these four powers, we need to confess all of our negative actions. We engaged in negative actions without knowing and negligence—intentionally or unintentionally—so we need to confess them all through the four powers.

The Limb of Rejoicing

With a heart full of delight, I rejoice at all the merits

Of buddhas and bodhisattvas,

*Pratyekabuddhas, those in training and the árhats
beyond training,*

And every living being, throughout the entire universe.

The ninth verse is the fourth limb, the limb of rejoicing the noble activities or virtuous acts of others. It literally means that we rejoice in all the meritorious deeds of all the buddhas in the ten directions, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, árhats, practitioners, and all sentient beings. “Rejoicing in others” refers to feeling good when someone is engaging in virtuous deeds. We should feel happy and joyous when we hear the noble activities of our gurus, deities, buddhas, noble bodhisattvas, and others.

Through rejoicing, we can accumulate great merit, too. To make our practice a real antidote to our jealous thoughts, we really need to practice rejoicing toward those ordinary human beings whom we normally feel jealous of. If we can practice rejoicing of their virtuous deeds, which is the direct antidote to our jealous thought toward them. Jealous thought is the source of suffering, worries, and anxieties. If someone is doing good, why do we have to worry, suffer, and feel sad? There is no reason to feel unhappy. If we feel sad—if others' good deeds make our mind sad—then it is our own fault. Instead, we should feel happy and supportive, and embrace, appreciate, and rejoice in their good deeds. In this way, we can feel happy by seeing or hearing of others' good deeds.

Practicing rejoicing in other's noble activities is a great and meritorious deed. It is taught in the Buddha's teaching, "One of the easiest ways to accumulate great merit is to practice rejoicing in others' virtuous or noble deeds." Not only it is meritorious, but it is also a direct antidote to our jealous thoughts, which is the source of suffering. As such, we should rejoice in all the noble activities of our gurus, deities, buddhas, bodhisattvas, and others.

The Limb of Requesting the Buddhas to Turn the Wheel of Dharma

*You who are like beacons of light shining through the
worlds,*

*Who passed through the stages of enlightenment, to attain
buddhahood, freedom from all attachment,*

I exhort you: all of you protectors,

Turn the unsurpassable wheel of Dharma.

The tenth verse is the fifth limb, the limb of requesting the buddhas to turn the wheel of Dharma. “Beacons of light shining through the worlds of the ten directions” refers to all the buddhas in the ten directions who are the ones dispelling the darkness of ignorance of their followers and others. “Freedom from all attachments” means one who does not have any attachments to all objects such as saṃsāra, self-purpose for

this life, next life... Being free from all attachments, then one gradually attains buddhahood.

Buddhas always help and benefit sentient beings. But we need to gather conditions for the buddhas to teach. For example, after Buddha Śākyamuni attained buddhahood in Bodh Gaya, he said that he had found the nectar-like Dharma, but it would not be understood by others. That was the reason he did not give teachings right after attaining buddhahood. At that time, the worldly gods and others supplicated and requested the Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma. Moreover, Buddha saw that there were five fortunate disciples who were ready to receive the Buddha's precious and profound teachings. After seven weeks of attaining buddhahood, Buddha bestowed the first Dharma teaching at Deer Park in Sarnath, Varanasi to five fortunate disciples on the four noble truths. Likewise, to make an auspicious connection to accumulate merit, we also need to request all the buddhas to turn the wheel of Dharma.

The Limb of Requesting the Buddhas Not to Enter Nirvāṇa

Joining my palms together, I pray

To you who intend to pass into nirvāṇa,

Remain for aeons as many as the atoms in this world,

And bring well-being and happiness to all living beings.

The sixth limb is the limb of requesting the buddhas not to enter nirvāṇa. For some buddhas who wish to enter nirvāṇa, we need to request them not to do so, but to remain in this world to guide, protect, and lead us. Although they have sincere wish to benefit sentient beings without any exceptions, sometimes when there are no right causes and conditions, they then wish to enter nirvāṇa. For such buddhas, we need to request them not to enter nirvāṇa.

The Limb of Dedication

*What little virtue I have gathered through my homage,
Through offering, confessing, and rejoicing,
Through exhortation and prayer—all of it
I dedicate to the enlightenment of all beings!*

The twelfth verse of the prayer is the seventh limb, the limb of dedication. We need to dedicate the first six limbs along with all our merit to attain buddhahood, for the sake of all sentient beings without any exception. This is proper dedication. Proper dedication is especially important. If our virtues, merit, and Dharma practice are sealed with proper dedication, that means our virtue and practice will become more powerful and will be difficult to destroy by our negative thoughts such as anger. Therefore, it is vital to seal our practice or virtuous deed with proper dedication.

With this, I conclude my brief explanation on the seven-limb prayer from the Samantabhadra prayer. At the end I wish the blessings of our gurus, Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha will always be with you. Thank you.

-The End-



■ His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, is the eldest son of His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (the 41st Sakya Trizin). Renowned for his erudition and the clarity of his teachings, His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin is regarded as one of the most highly qualified lineage holders in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. He belongs to the noble Khön family, whose successive generations have provided an unbroken lineage of outstanding Buddhist masters.

Since his youth, His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin has received an ocean of sutra and tantra teachings, empowerments, transmissions, and pith instructions from His Holiness the Sakya Trichen, as well as many other learned and accomplished masters. After years of rigorous philosophy studies at Sakya College in India, he was awarded the kachupa degree. And starting from the age of twelve, he has completed numerous meditation retreats, including the Hevajra retreat. With utmost humility, he travels extensively to bestow teachings and empowerments at the request of students across the globe.



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