



# Entering the Path of Enlightenment

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 very long lives, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.

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# CONTENT

A Brief Overview of Buddhism	1
The Essence of the Buddha's Teachings	6
Renouncing From Saṃsāra	8
The Two Truths	12
How Do Faith and Reason Complement Each Other	16
The Right Motivation to Practice the Dharma	17
Karma	19
The Vows in the Buddhist Tradition	23
The Function of a Buddhist Teacher	25
Mahāyāna	28
Loving-Kindness and Compassion	30
Bodhicitta	33
Bodhisattvas and Their Main Practices	35
The Structure of the Path and the Role of Meditation	37
The Vajrayāna Practice	39

## A Brief Overview of Buddhism

All Buddhist traditions originated from the teachings of Buddha Śākyamuni. About 2,500 years ago, the great Lord Buddha Śākyamuni descended from the heavenly realm of Tuṣita and entered into the womb of Queen Māyādevī. At that time, Queen Māyādevī dreamed of a white elephant with six tusks entering into her body. Throughout her pregnancy and labor, Queen Māyādevī did not experience any pain—only bliss. Lord Buddha Śākyamuni was born in Lumbinī as Prince Siddhārtha. This was the first and most important noble activity of Buddha. His parents were King Śuddhodana and Queen Māyādevī of the Kapilavastu Kingdom.

As soon as Prince Siddhārtha was born into this world in the Lumbinī Garden, he took seven steps, with a lotus appearing in each step he made. He said, “I am the excellent being of this world.” At the same time that Prince Siddhārtha was born, many auspicious and wondrous signs appeared, including noble sons

were born to many other kings and their consorts. Thus, this strongly indicates that Prince Siddhārtha was an extraordinary being. He continued to demonstrate his excellent qualities as a child.

At the age of twenty-nine, one day, he went outside the palace and on the streets saw a sick person. Instantly, he felt the physical pain and mental suffering that the sick man was experiencing. He really felt that experience within himself and was determined to think of a solution to overcome such suffering. He thought about the possibility of learning medicine but realized that medicine can cure only physical sickness—not completely end suffering.

He wondered if there were a method to eliminate all sufferings. He made a trip out of the palace again. This time he encountered an old person. Just like before, he instantaneously felt the physical pain and mental suffering of old age within himself. He made another trip and this time he saw a dead person. He immediately experienced the same suffering of death within himself.

These three encounters made him ponder: “Just being a prince in a glorious kingdom is not the right way to help and to benefit all beings.” Thus, he renounced his kingdom and left the palace to seek for Dharma.



He had been practicing Dharma for years. At one point, when he was meditating under the Bodhi Tree, many evil spirits or māras attempted to create obstacles to disrupt his meditation by attacking him with weapons and by emanating many beautiful girls dancing in front of him. However, due to the power of loving-kindness and compassion, he defeated all these evil beings. He also transformed the shower of weapons into the shower of flowers. All of this was possible through the power of practice, loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta or the enlightened mind.

He eventually attained buddhahood in Bodh Gaya, for the sake of all sentient beings. This is the second most important noble activity of Buddha Śākyamuni. After attaining buddhahood, he did not turn the wheel of Dharma right away. He declared, “I have the precious and profound nectar-like Dharma teachings, but no one is ready to receive such teachings.” However, brahmās and others supplicated to Buddha to turn the wheel of Dharma. Forty-nine days after attaining buddhahood, he turned the first wheel of the Dharma in Deer Park, Sarnath, near Varanasi, to five fortunate disciples, giving teachings on the four noble truths, which revealed the truths of suffering, its origination, its cessation, and the path for cessation of suffering.

From that time onward Buddha has given an enormous number

of teachings in order to suit the different mentalities of the followers, so that they can be freed from the lower realms and also from of the entire saṃsāra, to attain liberation and eventually the state of buddhahood. So, Buddha's third main activity is turning the wheel of Dharma in Deer Park, Sarnath, near Varanasi, and bestowing many teachings to many different followers. Actually, Buddha teaches many different followers at the same time with his one voice speaking in all languages and also in different topics, according to the beings' own mentalities. In such way, he turned the wheel of Dharma for many years.

In the end, to show the truth of impermanence, he entered into mahāparinirvāṇa while resting between two trees in Kuśinagara. This is the fourth main noble activity of the Buddha. Interestingly, all these four main noble activities are associated with trees. Buddha was born under a tree, attained buddhahood under the Bodhi Tree, turned the wheel of Dharma for the first time in Deer Park, where there was a forest, and finally Buddha entered into mahāparinirvāṇa between two trees. So, Buddha's four main activities are directly related with the trees or natural environment.

According to the Mahāyāna tradition, the greater vehicle, all these noble activities are for the sake of average common people. In reality Buddha Śākyamuni attained buddhahood countless eons before he entered to this world as Prince Siddhārtha.

These four places—the places of birth, of attaining buddhahood, of the first turning the wheel of Dharma, and of entering into mahāparinirvāṇa—are considered the most holy places for all Buddhist followers, because these four places are where Buddha performed the four main noble activities.

Before Buddha Śākyamuni passed into mahāparinirvāṇa, Buddha said to his followers that these four main holy places are where all the followers of the Buddha should go and practice. They can accumulate great merit and receive great benefit from performing good deeds and doing such practices in these holy places.

## **The Essence of the Buddha's Teachings**

Lord Buddha has given many types of teachings. Overall, Buddha's teachings are based on the law of karma and interdependent origination. We can summarize and group them into various categories. One type of grouping is based on the three main turnings of the wheel of Dharma.

Buddha first turned the wheel of Dharma at Deer Park in Sarnath, near Varanasi. He gave the teaching on the four noble truths: the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering.

First, it is important to know the sickness. Second, one needs to remove the cause of sickness. Third is to experience the state free of sickness. Fourth, to achieve this, we need to adopt the right remedy or antidote that can overcome sickness and the cause of sickness. Similarly, the truth of suffering is like knowing the sickness. The truth of the origination of suffering is like the

cause of sickness. The truth of cessation is like the state free from sickness, which is the state free from suffering. And the truth of the path is like adopting the right remedy to overcome the sickness and the cause of sickness; it means adopting the right path or right method or right Dharma practice in order to remove suffering and the cause of suffering.

Buddha turned the second wheel of Dharma on Vulture Peak, teaching emptiness and the perfection of wisdom. The third turning took place in Śrāvastī and focused on buddha nature, bridging the teachings between the sūtras and the tantras.

## Renouncing From Saṃsāra

When Buddha Śākyamuni first turned the wheel of Dharma, he taught the four noble truths to the five fortunate disciples in Sarnath, Varanasi. The first of the four noble truths is the truth of suffering.

What is suffering? According to the Buddha's teachings, there are three kinds of suffering that are known as the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and the suffering of all conditioned phenomena.

Suffering of suffering is the suffering that ordinary people recognize as suffering, for example, physical pain, mental anxiety, worries, and so on.

Suffering of change refers to the mundane happiness that ordinary people recognize as happiness. The feelings are known as the suffering of change because this happiness will end as suffering. For example, in our mundane world, sometimes we feel happy but such happiness does not last for years and years

without experiencing suffering. When we are tired, we may stretch our limbs and by doing so, we feel comfortable and relaxed. But if we stretch our limbs for hours, we will feel sore and thus we will not feel happy anymore. The “happiness” we feel at the beginning has now become suffering. Similarly, all mundane happiness will end with suffering. Hence the suffering of change.

All-pervasive suffering of conditioned existence is more profound and difficult to understand for beginners. As we study the Buddha’s teachings more, we will have better understanding. Briefly, due to the inherent propensity of grasping at the five aggregates, or skandhas, we experience misery. There are three aspects of this type of suffering:

- *Suffering of ceaseless worldly activities.* No matter how much time or effort we spend on worldly activities, these are never-ending.
- *Suffering of never being satisfied with various forms of desire.* No matter how much we have accumulated or possessed, instead of feeling satisfied, we desire more.
- *Suffering of never being aware of birth and death.* From beginningless time until now, due to our karma and defilements, we have been taking birth in the six realms again and again.

To renounce saṃsāra means to have the sincere wish to gain liberation from the whole saṃsāra.

To have this sincere wish, first we need to know the nature of saṃsāra. If we examine saṃsāra, we will realize that the nature of saṃsāra is none other than suffering. For example, in this world there are many different countries. Some are more developed while some are not developed, but wherever we go in this world, we do not find a single place where there is no suffering. So, wherever we go, we have physical pain, mental anxiety, and all kinds of suffering.

Through such observation and reflection, we can realize that this whole world is suffering. This whole saṃsāra is in the nature of suffering. Therefore, we should not have strong attachment to saṃsāra. We should have a sincere wish to gain liberation from this whole saṃsāra.

Such a genuine wish is called the thought of renunciation.

### *Liberation*

In the Buddha's teachings, when it says "liberation," it refers to the mind that is liberated from mental affliction. There are many different levels of liberation, depending on how much obscuration has been eliminated from the mind.



To gain liberation, first it is important to know the source of all these sufferings of saṃsāra. When we examine saṃsāra, we will know that sufferings are caused by negative actions; and negative actions are caused or motivated by ignorance, the failure to understand the law of karma and the effects of attachment, anger, and other mental afflictions. The root of all these mental afflictions is in misapprehending one's inherent identity or clinging to one's self as if it were truly and independently existent. Such mistaken thoughts are the root of all the suffering of the entire saṃsāra.

The method that can control and eliminate such thoughts is to gain liberation from saṃsāra. Once we gain liberation from the whole saṃsāra, we can progress on the path and then attain higher liberation depending on our realization and wisdom. Eventually we can gain the highest realization, which is to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

## The Two Truths

All the Buddha's teachings can be understood as explanations of the two truths: the relative truth and the ultimate truth.

The relative truth is about how things appear, such as “self” and “others”—all the dualistic phenomena that one perceives in actuality are not truly existent. This is because in the reality of relative truth all compounded things are of dependent origination—they have their own causes and conditions—and as such are impermanent. Since all compounded things are of dependent origination, this “self” expresses only relative truth; this self is free from truly existing because based on the relative truth, all compounded things are impermanent. Nothing is unchanging. Everything is always changing, although one can see only the gross part of impermanence. In actuality, everything changes momentarily all the time, and that is the subtle part of impermanence that one does not see with one's ordinary eyes; one does not understand this with one's ordinary mind.

The second truth is known as the *ultimate truth*, which is none other than ultimate reality. The ultimate truth refers to how things truly are—beyond dualism. To realize the ultimate reality, first it is important to realize the nature of relative truth. Without realizing the relative truth, it is not possible to realize the ultimate truth. In other words, without realizing the dependent origination or impermanence, it is not possible to realize the ultimate truth. Without realizing the ultimate truth, one will not know the real nature of all the phenomena. One will also not be able to gain liberation or the enlightenment state without knowing the ultimate reality.

The teaching of the ultimate truth is very profound. But at the same time, it is very important for a follower to receive this profound teaching at the right time. If one receives this teaching at the wrong time, when one is not ready to receive such teaching, then there is more harm than benefit because by hearing such a teaching, one may fall down to the extreme of nihilism. It is important to be very careful. If there is a misunderstanding of the view of the ultimate truth, then there is more harm than benefit.

For example, if there is a poisonous snake bothering people, and one catches the snake, then this act will rescue many beings from fear and danger. But if one makes a mistake when catching the snake, then one can be bitten by it, which can cause great pain and

harm, and may even cause the death of the person. So if one catches this snake with a wrong method, then there is more harm than benefit. Similarly, if one misunderstands the real meaning of the ultimate truth, then there is more harm than benefit. Therefore, be careful, learn slowly, and learn at the right time.

*How does the realization of no-self free us from suffering?*

Self-clinging is the root of all suffering of saṃsāra because suffering is caused by negative actions. These negative actions are caused by the three poisonous thoughts or mental afflictions. The root of all these mental afflictions is self-clinging. Therefore, this self-clinging is the root of all the suffering of saṃsāra. Unless and until we eliminate this root, we would not be able to gain complete liberation from saṃsāra. If the root of the tree is poisonous, then all the tree trunks, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits that are grown from this root are poisonous, too. Just by cutting the branches or tree trunks will not be able to remove the poisonous tree completely because the root is still there. In order to eliminate this poisonous tree completely, we need to remove the root of the tree. Similarly, it is important for us to remove the root of suffering of saṃsāra in order to remove the suffering of saṃsāra.

*Following the Footsteps of the Buddha*

To become a follower of the Buddha, first and foremost it is very important to believe the Buddha's fundamental teachings, such as the law of karma, and to believe in the Triple Gem: Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. Then, based on this, one has this wish to become a follower of the Buddha. Based on one's sincere wish, then, first one needs to reflect on the cause of refuge, which means to reflect on the fear of experiencing the suffering of saṃsāra. And out of this fear, together with having great faith in the Triple Gem as well as out of great compassion, one desires to go take refuge in the Triple Gem.

Therefore, out of these three causes and reasons, one takes refuge in the Triple Gem through a proper ritual or ceremony, and then one becomes a real Buddhist.

## **How Do Faith and Reason Complement Each Other**

The Buddha said that his followers should examine his teachings. After thorough examination, followers then can accept and believe in his teachings. Buddha also said that it is important to have genuine faith, which is like a sown seed. If the seed is scorched by fire, then by planting such seed in a vital ground, no matter how much effort one spends looking after it, such as by ensuring that the right moisture and temperature are given, it will still not grow into a good crop.

Similarly, without a sown seed, no matter how much time you spend to study, contemplate, and meditate on the Buddha's teachings, still you will not have inner realization and inner qualities. Therefore, faith is very important. But faith and examination are in the same context; in other words, these two are not contradicting each other. Here "faith" means faith with reason. If we examine thoroughly—then through such great reason—one can have very strong and unshakable faith, and such faith is very important in Buddha's teachings.

## **The Right Motivation to Practice the Dharma**

To perform any Dharma practice, having the right motivation is very, very important. Motivation here means a sincere wish or genuine reason to practice the Dharma. The benefit of having the right motivation is that when we perform any Dharma practice, if we do so with the right motivation, then our practice will become more meritorious and thus can accumulate more merit. If we do not have the right motivation, not only will we not accumulate much merit, but our practice will not be a real Dharma practice, too. It will only be at the superficial level; it will not be genuine. For example, two people are performing circumambulations around a stūpa or temple; both have performed the same number of circumambulations, but one is doing with the right motivation, while the other is practicing with mundane motivation, which is not the right motivation. Although both have performed the same practice in the same number of times, the person with the right motivation will earn much greater merit than the other person. Therefore, having the right motivation can make our practice

the real cause to gain liberation and buddhahood. In other words, having the right motivation can make our practice real or genuine.

How do we cultivate the right motivation? First, we need to have a sincere wish to gain liberation from the whole saṃsāra. Buddha has given an enormous number of teachings; the purpose of all these teachings is to lead all sentient beings from saṃsāra to the temporary result, which is to gain liberation from saṃsāra, and the ultimate result, which is to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

Therefore, first and foremost, we should have the thought of renunciation. Buddha has given us the teachings to gain liberation from saṃsāra. If we use this teaching to remain in saṃsāra, then it is not right—it is against the purpose of Buddha’s teachings. Therefore, first we should have the right motivation—the thought of renunciation. Then we should have genuine loving-kindness and compassion to all sentient beings, and we should have bodhicitta, which means the wish to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. In order to attain buddhahood, we need to engage in general and specific Dharma practices. Eventually we can generate the ultimate bodhicitta, and then we can move forward and progress on the path of the ten bhūmis and finally we can attain the eleventh bhūmi, which is perfect buddhahood.



# Karma

Generally speaking, karma means action—all the activities that are performed by all beings. If the action is motivated by positive thoughts, then it becomes a virtuous action. If the action is motivated by negative thoughts, then it becomes a negative action.

*How can we cultivate virtues and abandon nonvirtues?*

First, it is important to know the results of virtues and nonvirtues. If we know the result of virtues is positive and the result of nonvirtues is negative, then naturally it will help us to put more effort in doing positive actions and abstain from nonvirtuous actions. Because no one wants to experience a negative result, which is to experience suffering.

In fact, virtuous actions will always yield good results and nonvirtuous actions will always yield bad results. For example, if the root of a tree is medicine, then all its trunks, fruits, flowers, and whatever grows from that tree is medicine. Conversely, if the root of the tree is poisonous, then whatever grows from the root of that tree is poisonous. Similarly, if we perform virtuous deeds,

then all the results will be positive; if we commit nonvirtuous deeds, then all the results will be negative.

Positive action means action that is motivated by thoughts that are free from attachment, anger, and the type of ignorance that fails to acknowledge the law of cause and effect. Out of these, one can gain a positive result—temporary happiness and eventually one can attain the state of enlightenment, the state in which one can gain ultimate happiness.

*Do good deeds bring about liberation from saṃsāra?*

Positive actions motivated by great loving-kindness and compassion can yield positive and good results in this saṃsāra. Loving-kindness and compassion are the antidotes that can control mental afflictions. Any actions that are motivated by these thoughts and other virtuous thoughts are the cause of gaining good results in saṃsāra. The positive action that leads us to gain liberation is wisdom that realizes the true nature of all phenomena. Practices like loving-kindness and compassion can be a factor in attaining liberation, but are not the true cause that will result in liberation from saṃsāra.

*How is it possible that bad things happen to good people?*

Actually, the result of action can be ripened in this life or after one lifetime, a few lifetimes, or many lifetimes. There is no

certainty of time when the result will ripen from such-and-such an action. When good practitioners face experiences of sickness or other obstacles, this means these are not the results of their present positive actions but are the results of past negative actions.

Sometimes, when an ordinary person observes an action, they cannot observe in a proper way because they can see only the physical and verbal actions; they cannot observe what kind of motivation the person has to perform such-and-such a positive action. In this life, it seems like they are performing positive actions, but in reality, they are acting from a bad motivation, so this means these actions look like positive actions but are actually not real positive actions. This may also be a cause of experiencing sickness or obstacles.

Actually, the law of karma is fair to every being, without discrimination and exception. There is no privilege accorded to those who hold higher titles, those with more power, fame, wealth, and so on. Whether we have a high title or not, whether we are rich or poor does not matter. Whoever performs a positive action will gain a positive result. Whoever commits a negative action will gain a negative result.

Based on the law of karma, we cannot hide our actions. In this world, we can hide our actions from the government officials or from other people. But we cannot hide any actions from the law

of karma. For example, if one takes poison in front of many people or if one takes poison secretly without anyone knowing, its result is the same—it will cause stomach pain or can even end one’s life. Similarly, whether one commits an action in front of people or secretly without telling anyone, it will still have the same result. Not only will it have the same result, but actually doing it secretly will be more powerful, because not only has one made the action, it is compounded by the power of not telling others. Whether one has done positive or negative action secretly; its results are in fact more powerful. On the other hand, if one does positive or negative actions in front of people, they are less powerful.

The law of karma is fair to everyone. So, whoever performs positive actions will gain happiness such as happiness in this life, happiness in the next life, happiness in many lifetimes, and gradually one will gain liberation from saṃsāra and eventually attain buddhahood.

If one commits negative actions, then one will experience suffering. One will not gain liberation from saṃsāra, which means one will not be able to gain liberation from suffering, because the nature of saṃsāra is full of suffering. If one has attachment to saṃsāra, it means one has attachment to suffering because the nature of saṃsāra is suffering. Therefore, by knowing the law of karma, one should put great effort into performing virtuous actions to gain happiness for all beings, and one should abstain from committing negative actions in order to remove suffering for all beings.

## The Vows in the Buddhist Tradition

The vows in the Buddhist tradition are originated from Buddha Śākyamuni. This is something that enables us to follow the rules and to be more disciplined, which will help us to abstain from many wrong actions and cause more and more happiness in this life, in the next life, and in many future lifetimes. Eventually this will help us to attain the enlightenment state, which is the state of ultimate happiness. For example, in this mundane world, there are many people who just want to have a strong body. To achieve this goal, they are willing to restrict themselves from many actions, including rejecting many unhealthy foods and beverages. Although fast food is tasty, these people can abstain from these unhealthy foods and beverages. If they can abstain from many tasty and unhealthy foods and beverages just to gain a strong body, then why can't we abstain from doing many negative actions to be free from suffering, and to do more virtuous deeds, which are the cause of happiness? Such discipline can help us gain much greater benefit than just gaining our strong body.

*What are the vows of monks and nuns?*

The monks' and nuns' vows are celibacy vows. Based on this, monks and nuns will keep many rules that will help them abstain from more and more negative actions and help them to be better people in a more effective way. Being a monk or a nun means they can spend their whole time on Dharma studies and practice; they do not have to worry about their livelihood or their own family members. So, they have more time and a chance to study and practice the Dharma. Especially in modern times, even just to take a month or two months off from worldly matters is not easy for lay people. If lay people want to receive one- or two-month-long teachings, they may have to prepare a year or more ahead. Monks and nuns, however, are able to receive many months of teachings without preparing for a long time in advance.

## The Function of a Buddhist Teacher

Teachers are the ones who pass the teachings of Lord Buddha to followers. At the moment, we as ordinary human beings do not have the fortune to see the Buddha with our own eyes and receive teachings from the Buddha directly. Without the teachers, it is not possible to receive teachings or practice the teachings; therefore, we must rely on a teacher.

Some may think that just by relying on books, one can still study and practice Dharma. But Buddha's teachings are very precious and profound and need more explanation. Just by reading books will not explain all the details. Therefore, we must rely on a teacher.

*What are the qualities of a qualified teacher?*

Ideally speaking, the teacher should have many qualities; for instance, first and foremost, the teacher should have received, studied, and practiced the teachings. They should be upholding vows and should also practice Dharma teachings according to the

Buddha's teachings. If the teachers are acting in accordance with the Buddha's teachings or are good practitioners, such teachers are qualified teachers.

It is important to examine the teacher before receiving any teachings from that teacher. Then, if one realizes a teacher is qualified, one can accept him or her as one's own teacher.

A qualified teacher means a teacher who has all qualities, including great compassion, and other positive thoughts. Teachers should have patience to teach students. In addition, teachers should have a sincere wish to teach students without any wrong motivation. Teachers also should teach according to the mentality of the students. If the student can only comprehend short teachings, the teacher should not give long teachings to that student. So according to the mentality of the students, the teacher should give teachings. But in public teachings, the teacher should offer teachings in a simple way so that anyone can understand their meaning.

There are different vows, which can be combined into three that are known as *prātimokṣa*, *bodhicitta*, and *Mantrayāna* vows. Some practitioners take only *prātimokṣa* vows, some take *prātimokṣa* and *bodhicitta* vows, while some have *prātimokṣa*, *bodhicitta*, and *Mantrayāna* vows. Depending on your own vows



and depending on what kind of teachings you want to receive, you need to search for a teacher who can give you that specific teaching. But to find that teacher, you need to identify specific qualities of that teacher.

There are different qualities depending on different teachings. If one is giving vinaya teachings, then you need to look for a particular quality. If you are looking for a teacher who can give Mahāyāna teachings, then you need to look for a teacher who has the qualities to give Mahāyāna teachings. And if you are looking for a Mantrayāna teacher, then you need to look for a teacher who has the quality to give Mantrayāna teachings. It depends on the teachings you are going to receive.

The quality of the teacher is to not only hold his or her vows but also to receive the teachings that are passed down from the Buddha in an unbroken lineage. The teachers can understand the meaning of the teachings, can teach students with the right motivation, and have the ability to help students to understand these teachings.

# Mahāyāna

Generally speaking, Mahāyāna practice is based on the concept of renunciation toward all of saṃsāra, which is common to all the Buddhist schools. It is also based on loving-kindness and compassion to all sentient beings, and bodhicitta or the enlightened mind. Bodhicitta is the main essence of all the Mahāyāna teachings.

In general, it is said that Mahāyāna has seven great qualities.

The first greatness is the greatness of object, or purpose, which means that whatever Mahāyāna practice we perform, we always need to focus on all sentient beings. The purpose of performing all the Mahāyāna practices is for the sake of all sentient beings. The object of the Mahāyāna practice is very wide and infinite; therefore, it is called the greatness of object.

The second greatness is the greatness of activity. Whatever action a Mahāyāna practitioner performs, it is always to benefit both others and oneself.

The third greatness is the greatness of wisdom. In Mahāyāna practices, wisdom realizes both the selflessness of a person<sup>[1]</sup> and selflessness of phenomena<sup>[2]</sup> completely.

The fourth greatness is the greatness of diligence with joy. With such great diligence, one accumulates merit and wisdom for three countless eons.

The fifth greatness is the greatness of skillful means, which means through various methods, one practices the Mahāyāna teachings, or one benefits all sentient beings.

The first five greatnesses are based on the Mahāyāna path, while the sixth and seventh greatnesses are based on the resultant state of buddhahood.

The sixth greatness is the greatness of quality, which means the greatness of a buddha's ultimate qualities.

The seventh greatness is the greatness of enlightened activities. Buddha's noble activities are infinite; we simply cannot comprehend all the enlightened activities.

These last two greatnesses are based on the resultant state of buddhahood.

In short, Mahāyāna means having these seven greatnesses.

Notes:

[1] Selflessness of a person: the absence of a permanent, unitary, and independent identity in an individual being.

[2] Selflessness of phenomena: all entities are of no inherent existence.

## Loving-Kindness and Compassion

Loving-kindness in the Mahāyāna teaching is defined as great, infinite, or limitless loving-kindness. In other words, it means wishing all sentient beings to gain happiness without exception and discrimination, and to engage in virtuous deeds, which are the cause of happiness.

To practice loving-kindness, first and foremost, we need to focus on the object. If our object is limitless, then based on this, we can naturally develop infinite loving-kindness. So here, our object, sentient beings, is being referred to as all the beings in the six realms; not only all Buddhist followers or followers of all the other religions, but also nonbelievers, animals, and all other beings. In short, “all sentient beings” means all beings in the six realms including the bardo beings. If we can focus on the limitless sentient beings, then naturally we can develop infinite loving-kindness.

Compassion in Mahāyāna teachings refers to the great, limitless,

or infinite compassion that means wishing all sentient beings to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering, which are negative actions. The object of loving-kindness and the object of compassion are the same—all sentient beings. Based on this, we need to develop infinite or limitless compassion.

When we develop infinite loving-kindness and compassion, then naturally we can control many negative thoughts toward others. We will not have anger, jealousy, or competitive thoughts toward any other sentient beings, because we wish to benefit all sentient beings without any exception or discrimination through the practice of loving-kindness and compassion. Wishing to hate or harm, or having jealous thoughts toward others are the opposite of benefiting others. At the same time, we cannot have both positive and negative thoughts on the same object. For example, in one glass we cannot have hot water and cold water at the same time; the glass should either be hot or cold. Likewise, we will either have positive or negative thoughts toward an object at that time in our mental continuum. Therefore, when we really have positive thoughts such as infinite loving-kindness and compassion, then we can truly control our negative thoughts. By controlling our negative thoughts and through the practice of positive thoughts, we can share peace and harmony with all sentient beings without any exception.

*How can we develop loving-kindness and compassion?*

We can develop infinite loving-kindness and compassion toward all sentient beings gradually. First, we can develop loving-kindness and compassion toward our family members and loved ones, and gradually we can extend our well-wishing to our neighbors and people whom we know, and then to people whom we do not know and to our enemies, and eventually to all sentient beings.

When we extend positive thoughts to all sentient beings, we can categorize the objects of our loving-kindness, such as all the people in this continent or that continent, or then all human beings, then all animals, and then all beings of other realms.

By categorizing the objects of our loving-kindness and compassion, we can gradually extend our love and compassion to all sentient beings.

# Bodhicitta

The meaning of bodhicitta is a combination of *bodhi*, which means enlightenment, and *citta*, which means mind. Bodhicitta refers to a mind that wishes and practices to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. Bodhicitta is the essence of all the Mahāyāna teachings. Without bodhicitta, we cannot do any Mahāyāna practice. This bodhicitta is based on its own cause. All the results are in actuality based on their own causes and conditions. Similarly, the resulting bodhicitta is also based on cause. The cause of bodhicitta is great compassion. The cause of great compassion is great loving-kindness. Out of great loving-kindness, one can develop great compassion. Out of great compassion, one can develop bodhicitta. So, bodhicitta is the mind that sincerely wishes to help all sentient beings by attaining buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

*How can we cultivate bodhicitta?*

First, it is important to know the benefit of developing bodhicitta.

As it is explained in great detail in the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* by the great Ācārya Śāntideva: Bodhicitta is like an elixir that transforms iron into gold. Similarly, bodhicitta is the tool that transforms ordinary human beings into a buddha or transforms ordinary minds or thoughts into ultimate wisdom.

Bodhicitta is like a skillful captain who leads all passengers safely to the destination. There are many examples. In short, in the sūtras, Buddha said “If the benefit of developing bodhicitta were to be experienced in a physical form, then the whole universe is too small to contain it.” Therefore, it has great benefit. If we know such great benefit, then it will encourage us to develop bodhicitta for the sake of all sentient beings, including oneself.



## Bodhisattvas and Their Main Practices

Generally speaking, a person who has developed *bodhicitta*—the enlightened mind—and has taken the *bodhisattva vow* is known as a bodhisattva. There are many levels of bodhisattvas, such as bodhisattvas on the path of accumulation, the path of application, the path of seeing, or the path of meditation. There are both “ordinary” bodhisattvas and “noble” bodhisattvas. In short, the main bodhisattva practices are the six perfections, also known as the *pāramitās*. The literal translation of *pāramitā* is “to go beyond,” which means to go beyond the ocean of *samsāra*. Therefore, these six perfections are very important.

*The perfection of generosity.* One’s materials, merit, and body are offered for the benefit of all sentient beings.

*The perfection of moral discipline.* One abstains from committing nonvirtuous deeds and performs virtuous deeds to help and benefit all sentient beings without any exception.

*The perfection of patience.* No matter what situation one may face,

one's peaceful mind is not disturbed—even when we hear unpleasant speech about one's self or when receiving great harm from others—still one should not feel upset or panicked. If one's mind is in a peaceful state, that means one has practiced the perfection of patience.

*The perfection of diligence with great joy.* One performs wholesome deeds with great joy.

*The perfection of meditative concentration.* One pays attention or has great concentration on wholesome objects with single-pointed focus, without any distraction.

*The perfection of wisdom.* This is the most important perfection. It is said that without the perfection of wisdom, the previous five perfections are not considered to be pāramitās or perfection. It is taught that the perfection of wisdom is like having eyes to see the road. Without the ability to clearly see, it is difficult for us to go on the path.

This is a very brief and short explanation on the main practices of bodhisattvas.

# The Structure of the Path and the Role of Meditation

*What are the structure of the path and the role of meditation?*

The root of suffering in saṃsāra is self-clinging. To remove self-clinging, first and foremost, we need to keep a pure moral discipline with right motivation. Having the right motivation, we need to study and contemplate the Dharma, and then finally meditate on the teachings. We need to have this kind of structure to practice Dharma in general.

When we meditate it is important to have a stable mind. To stabilize the mind, we need to practice, also known as calm-abiding. To perform this calm-abiding meditation, first place an object of meditation not too far away and not too close. The object can be a Buddha Śākyamuni statue or a blue flower. An important point is that this object should not move. When one focuses on this object, position one's body in the seven-point Vairocana meditation posture: legs crossed, back straight, hands in the lap or on the knees, shoulders spread like a vulture's wings,

head tilted forward with chin slightly lowered, tip of the tongue touching the palate of the mouth, and eyes gazing past the tip of the nose. One should not blink one's eyes or change one's gaze. There is a wave of thought in our mind and if one's eyes move, then there is a danger of generating more thoughts during meditation. One should not move one's body; one should sit still and focus on this unmoving object meditation single-pointedly without having any distraction. This means that one's mind is completely settled on the object of meditation without any distraction.

When one has this śamatha practice, then based on this, one can gradually realize the ultimate nature or ultimate reality. Seeing the ultimate reality directly is known as insight wisdom, the kind of wisdom obtained by the noble beings or noble bodhisattvas. When one has this insight wisdom, that is the real antidote that directly eliminates the root of suffering, which is self-clinging. Through this elimination, one can see the ultimate reality directly with one's own wisdom and gain liberation from the whole saṃsāra at the same time. Therefore, these two practices—known as śamatha and vipassanā—are very, very important. Once we reach the first bhūmi, which is the first stage on the path to enlightenment—once we have seen the ultimate reality directly—we will not fall down into saṃsāra again. Instead, we will only progress forward on the path of the bhūmis, and eventually attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

## The Vajrayāna Practice

Mahāyāna has two traditions: the Pāramitāyāna and the Vajrayāna. The Vajrayāna tradition has more methods to realize the ultimate truth or ultimate reality when we are on the path of accumulation or application. Further, it has more methods to gain liberation or attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

Vajrayāna is very secret and is not given to anyone. One has to fulfill special criteria or qualifications to receive the Vajrayāna teaching or tantra teaching. Actually, all these Buddhist tantric teachings are directly given by the Buddha. The word “tantra” can mean tantric teaching, Buddhist tradition, or the mental continuum of our own consciousness.

### *How Does One Enter the Vajrayāna Path?*

In the Vajrayāna tradition, it is very important to receive the empowerment before performing any Vajrayāna practice. For example, if one does not own a land, first one needs to get

permission or authority from the landowner. If one uses that land without authorization, the landowner can punish one. Similarly, without receiving any empowerment, we do not have the authority or the permission to practice the Vajrayāna path. So, in order to practice the Vajrayāna path, it is very important to first receive the empowerment. In actuality, in the Vajrayāna tradition, empowerment is not just a doorway to enter the Vajrayāna path but is the main part and practice of the Vajrayāna path. Therefore, receiving empowerment is very important for all Vajrayāna followers.





- 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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