



Ecology, Interdependence, and Buddhism

H.H. the 42nd 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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Ecology, Interdependence, and Buddhism

In this world, we generally focus on and put effort into many activities. The purpose of performing many activities is not only to develop the material world, but mainly to help sentient beings. We must aim to create a better place for all sentient beings, especially human beings, to live. Our effort should not be simply to make the world look beautiful, but mainly to bring happiness and comfort to the lives of ourselves and others. Sometimes, however, we place too much focus on our current life, which is temporary, and forget about our future lives and future generations.

This teaching is about ecology as related to interdependence and Buddhism. Actually, interdependence is one of Buddha's teachings. So, first, I will talk about Buddha's teachings.

Buddha bestowed many teachings. The purpose of all his teachings is to tame and subdue our minds—to have a peaceful mind. If we have a peaceful mind, then we will have a peaceful, external world. All external violence, disturbances, and destruction are created by our inner mind. When two people or two groups do not have a good relationship, they become angry

and their inner minds become disturbed. Then, due to their disturbed minds, they create disturbances in the external world. Battles and wars are usually started by a group leader or leaders of a country because of their anger and inner disturbances.

So, it is very important to control our inner mind. When our mind becomes wild or very disturbed, we show anger through our physical conduct and verbal expressions to others. Physically we fight and verbally we say harsh or bad words to others because of our angry mind. Due to these negative thoughts, we fight within our own family and against neighbors or others. Sometimes the fight becomes very big, such as fighting between groups or even countries. All these disturbances are not initiated by our physical body or verbal expressions. Without our mind, our body and speech cannot perform any actions.

Our physical and verbal actions have an interdependent relationship with our mind. If we can control our mind and have a peaceful mind of infinite loving-kindness and compassion, then due to these positive thoughts we will not harm anyone, attack anyone, or use harsh words against anyone. Loving-kindness and compassion are defined as the wish to benefit and help others by bringing them happiness and rescuing them from suffering. Harming others is the opposite of benefiting them. Since helping versus harming another sentient being are contradictory, these two opposite thoughts cannot be directed at the same being at the same time. So, our mental actions have an

interdependent or cause-and-effect relationship with our physical and verbal actions. Similarly, sentient beings and the external world or inanimate objects also have an interdependent relationship.

We have the power to make this external world better and more meaningful, yet we also have the power to destroy the world. We can do good or bad to this world. Our actions determine whether the world is protected or preserved in an ecological way. To explain from a Buddhist perspective, the external environment depends on our actions performed during this life as well as our past lives. If we examine suffering, we will find that the cause of suffering is our negative actions. To remove suffering, we must remove the cause of suffering, which is to remove negative actions. For example, to fully remove a tree, you first need to remove the tree's root. Without removing the tree's root, you cannot fully remove the tree. Likewise, to preserve the environment, we first need to preserve our actions by performing virtue and abandoning non-virtue. Our actions are the cause of how the external world or environment is affected.

In the Buddhist teachings, we say that by looking at our current situation, we will know what we have done in the past; what determines our future depends on our current mind and actions. If we have performed virtuous deeds then we will have a good body, but if we have performed non-virtue in our past then we will not have a good body in this life. Similarly, what type of body we will have in future depends on our current mind; our future depends on our mental actions that control our physical and verbal actions.

Whether the environment is good or bad or beautiful depends on actions committed in our prior lifetimes as well as actions committed in this life. And what type of environment we will have in future depends on our current actions. To really protect this world's environment, we must be vigilant and control our actions. If we perform virtuous actions, then the environment will be beautiful; if our actions are non-virtuous, then the environment will not be beautiful.

In the name of protecting a nation and its people, however, many negative actions have been committed that harm the environment. For example, missile tests are conducted that contaminate the earth and pollute the air, which in turn negatively affects people's health. Yet, all this harm is the result of human actions. Our mind determines whether we physically construct the missiles or discuss the plan to make them. When there is a wish, physical and verbal actions follow. If someone wishes to make missiles, then that wish can motivate their body and speech to turn their wish into reality and materialize their plans. So, it is most important to recognize that all actions rely on our mind.

Protecting the environment does not involve simply preserving trees, but extends to preserving our earth and its space. Ecology is part of interdependent origination due to the cause-and-effect relationship between our actions and the environment. Sometimes, humans deceive themselves and others. Nowadays, some people are just business-minded and think only about

short-term happiness in this life, instead of thinking about long-term happiness for themselves and others. For example, people use certain chemicals in farming so that crops will grow rapidly and bigger than their typical size. This spoils nature. Many people are deceived by these negative actions. Their consumption of this engineered food can adversely affect their health and result in sickness and suffering. Those responsible for these business practices fail to consider the well-being of fellow humans who consume this engineered food. They commit these bad actions to earn more money and for temporary happiness. In long run, however, their actions can adversely affect themselves and their loved ones as well.

Further, we must have the right motivation. For example, we might have a strong interest in protecting rare animal species, which is a virtuous action because it involves protecting the lives of other beings. But if we are really protecting animals out of great loving-kindness and compassion, then we should strive to equally protect every sentient being. If we protect only a few rare species but not all living beings, then the intention is not truly out of loving-kindness and compassion. If our intention is to protect one species simply because we might lose some national treasure or simply because we want the world to look beautiful, then our actions will be based on the wrong motivation. As a result of our wrong motivation, we will not have a good environment.

To truly preserve our environment, we must control our mental actions, which will help us control our physical and verbal actions

that affect the environment. As I previously mentioned, our environment and our actions have a very strong cause-and-effect relationship. To control our mental actions, we must tame our mind by cultivating loving-kindness, compassion, and inner peace. When there is inner peace, then naturally there will be outer peace. Our inner mind will become peaceful by developing loving-kindness and compassion. By doing this, then we can cause more peace and harmony to prevail in this world.

Questions and Answers

Question: There are different types of environmental activists. Some advocate taking action to preserve the environment, but others advocate aggressive or even militant-style actions to save certain animals and forests. Do we need both ways, or is there a better solution?

Answer: First, if we just focus on how to beautify this world, then we are not protecting all living beings. For example, if we are just focused on protecting a few rare species but are not protecting other animals like chickens, fish, and so on, then this will not yield a good environmental result. Second, with regards to using aggressive actions to protect rare species and nature, we must be mindful that whatever actions we do, we should do them with loving-kindness and compassion. We should have equal love to every being, not just to a few rare species. We should protect the environment with positive thoughts and motivation. If we have inner peace, then naturally we can beautify this world and protect rare species, the ocean, space, and the earth. So, my answer involves both sides, but it does not exactly adopt either.

Question: When we commit an action, how do we know whether our action is good or bad?

Answer: It depends on our motivation. If we are performing actions with the wish to help others and with the right intention, then most likely our action will be right. Sometimes though, we have a good intention, but, due to ignorance or not knowing, we commit a bad action. Yet, an action is not completely negative unless there is a bad motivation. For example, if you accidentally kill your friend while driving a car, the act of killing is not good, but you did not have the intention to kill that person. So, the action is not completely bad. A completely negative action occurs if we commit the bad action itself with a bad intention.

* * *

In conclusion, we dedicate with the wish that all beings gain happiness and its causes, and that they are freed from suffering and its causes.

-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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