



An Overview of the Sakya School of Tibetan Buddhism: History, Masters, and Teachings

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



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Published by “The Sakya Tradition”

www.sakyatradition.org

Email: info@sakyatradition.org

Wechat ID : sakyatradition

Weibo: sakyatradition

IG: the_sakya_tradition

Facebook: TheSakya

Youtube: 萨迦传承 The Sakya Tradition

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

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The Importance of Spiritual Practice

The world we live in now is very vast, and it has many different cultures, religions, ideas, traditions, and so on. However, there is one thing that we all have in common: everyone longs to gain happiness and wishes to eliminate suffering. Every individual, every organization, and every country is making efforts in the search for happiness. During the past century, much progress has been made in science and technology. Many problems that we used to have are now resolved; for example, many diseases that were incurable in the past can now be easily cured, many places where we could not go before can now be reached within hours, and so on. Yet at the same time, we cannot find real happiness no matter how much material progress we have made.

Although spiritual progress and practice are very important, the progress made through spiritual practice does not happen quickly; it takes time and is not directly visible, whereas the progress made in science and technology occurs very quickly and

we can see it very clearly. So, at one point, people in many parts of the world thought that spiritual practice was old-fashioned while technology and scientific developments must be worth pursuing. Because science has shown some remarkable results, many people have lost interest in spiritual progress—in fact in some countries people are deliberately discouraged from spiritual practice. But as time passes, it becomes clear that no matter how much material progress we make, we cannot achieve real happiness—no matter where we go, with whom we are associated, what we own, how wealthy we are, how famous we become, and how powerful we become—we cannot find real happiness.

Where can we find real happiness? It is through spiritual assistance. Even in countries that were deliberately encouraging citizens not to pursue any spiritual practice, nowadays so many of their people are interested, nevertheless. It has been shown very clearly to us that without spiritual help or assistance we cannot find real happiness.

There are many spiritual traditions, and I believe every spiritual tradition has its own beauty and way to help mankind, so I respect every spiritual tradition. Every spiritual tradition is necessary because we are different—we have different tastes, ideas, mentalities, propensities, and so on. Thus, one kind of

spiritual tradition is not enough, just like there is no one medicine that can cure all the diseases. One needs not just different medicines but different medical procedures and therapeutic approaches to cure different diseases. Likewise, a variety of spiritual practices are very important. For certain people Hinduism is more suitable, whereas for some people Christianity is more suitable, and for certain people Islam is more suitable, yet for some Buddhism is more suitable. Therefore, we must respect every spiritual tradition and allow individuals to choose by using their own wisdom and intuition. Then whatever spiritual path one practices, one must diligently practice according to the teachings. So, this is the most important matter currently observed in this world.

According to Buddhism, the reason we need to practice the Dharma is that the true nature of the mind of every sentient being is pure, it is never stained with obscurations—this is what we call “buddha nature.” But we are not able to recognize this at the moment. Instead of seeing the true nature of the mind, our mind is completely covered with obscurations, such as obscuration of defilement and obscuration of phenomena. As long as our minds are covered with these obscurations, we are in *saṃsāra*, the cycle of existence. As long as we are here in *saṃsāra*, we are not free from suffering, which is why, no matter how much effort we make, or how much material progress we have made,

or where we go, or with whom we are associated—we cannot find real peace and happiness. Therefore, one needs to practice the Dharma. Although every sentient being has buddha nature and thus has the opportunity to become a fully enlightened buddha, only human beings have the best chance, because the human mind is very sharp, and humans are more intelligent than other sentient beings, such as animals. Thus, a human being has the best chance to become a buddha. Therefore, spiritual practice is very important.

Tibetan Buddhism

As you know, Buddhism began in India and then spread to many countries, through the kindness of Tibetan Dharma kings, through the great blessings of Indian masters, and through the hardships undertaken by Tibetan translators. Buddhism was fully brought to Tibet, where we have the teachings of the Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna traditions as well as all the related sciences. In Tibet we have the complete Buddhist traditions and the full practice tradition; not only text studies but also the practices. So, although the original place of Buddhism is India, Tibet has become almost like India. Even today we still manage to keep the Buddhist traditions alive.

Buddhism travelled from India to Tibet in two different periods of time. The first period occurred during the 8th century, the teachings were introduced by Guru Padmasambhāva, the great abbot Śāntarakṣita, and the great Tibetan King Trisong Detsen. Buddhism was fully established during that time. When the great abbot Śāntarakṣita arrived, he tried to build and establish temples and monasteries. Tibet had many powerful local deities

that made a huge disturbance. During the daytime, Samye Monastery was built, yet at night it was dismantled by the local deities. The construction was disrupted by hailstorms, lightning ... all kinds of problems. The great Śāntarakṣita advised the Dharma king Trisong Detsen to invite Guru Padmasambhāva, who had the skill to subdue the local deities. While messages were sent to India, at the same time Guru Padmasambhāva also foresaw this and through his wisdom was able to meet the messenger on the road. He eventually came to Tibet and pacified the evil ones and converted the right ones from the wrong path to Buddhism. Through the pledge to protect the Dharma—these deities became Dharma protectors. Since then, temples were successfully built, and the monastic traditions were established.

When the great Śāntarakṣita came to Tibet, he said that since Tibetans had never received the monk's ordination, he was unsure if they could keep all the Buddhist monks' vows and precepts. As a result, a group of seven people received a trial ordination: three old, three young, and one middle-aged aspirants received the full bhikṣu ordination. Among the three-younger people, one was a member of the Khön family.

The Khöns were originally believed to be the direct descendants of celestial beings from Rūpadhātu, the realm of form. They came down to the high mountains of Tibet; one of the members

settled down while the others returned to the heaven realm. The member who settled in Tibet further established a hereditary lineage. At that time there was no Buddhism; there was only the traditional Bön^[1] religion, so they were Bönpos. Later, when Guru Padmasambhāva came to Tibet, Buddhism was established and members of the Khön hereditary lineage became Buddhists. One of them was Khön Nāgendrarakṣita (Khön Lu'i Wangpo Sungwa).

Buddhism was well established, and the words of Buddha and commentaries were all translated into Tibetan language. Khön Nāgendrarakṣita was one of the translators. He and his younger brother, Dorjé Rinchen, who was a householder, received an enormous number of important empowerments and teachings from Guru Padmasambhāva. They then practiced and attained high realizations. Their main deities at that time were Vajrakīlaya and Yangdak Heruka. Through these two deities, they attained very high realizations. For many generations, the Khön lineage maintained these practices.

This continued for about 13 generations. There were two brothers named Khön Sherab Tsultrim and Khön Könchok Gyalpo. At one time there was a big gathering with dancing and games which Khön Könchok Gyalpo, the younger brother, attended. When he returned home from the gathering, his older brother Khön Sherab Tsultrim asked about the gathering. Khön Könchok Gyalpo

replied that he enjoyed the dancing and sports at the gathering, yet the most impressive performance was the sacred dance. Khön Sherab Tsultrim remarked that it was not right for sacred dances to be performed for a public audience as they are very holy and should be played only in secluded places for a small number of people. He further explained that he was old and thus was not able to learn, but his younger brother, Khön Könchok Gyalpo, was young and was able to learn. He instructed Khön Könchok Gyalpo, “Whatever old teachings we have, you should conceal them, and now is the time to establish a separate school.”

At that time, the most famous lama^[2] was Drokmi Śākya Yeshé. Khön Könchok Gyalpo went to request teachings from Drokmi Śākya Yeshé. Drokmi was an extremely strict teacher; he did not give teachings to more than one person at the time. At the beginning Khön Könchok Gyalpo had some difficulty. When Drokmi gave blessing on the head of Khön Könchok Gyalpo, he said, “When I touch your hair, I feel your lineage has special quality that will spread the teaching.” So, he gave the teachings to Khön Könchok Gyalpo. Later, Khön Könchok Gyalpo established the Sakya Order and built its first monastery, the Sakya Monastery, in 1073, more than 900 years ago.

In Tibetan Buddhism, there are four major schools: the old translation school is Nyingma, while the three new schools of translation are Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelug.

Notes

1. Bön tradition, the autochthonous religious tradition of Tibet.
2. Lama (Tib. ལ་མ་; Skt. “guru”), refers to a spiritual teacher in the Vajrayāna tradition.



Khön Könchok Gyalpo

The Tibetan Buddhism School of Sakya Tradition and Its Special Qualities

What is “Sakya”? Sakya literally means grey earth. The town where the school was founded and the school itself are both called “Sakya.” The area has a mountain in the shape of an elephant, known as Ponpori Mountain. The mountain is marked by a circle of grey earth, hence the name “Sakya.” This area has three special qualities.

Long before the Sakya school was established, Guru Padmasambhāva arrived at Sakya and said, “In the future there will be a big monastery established here. It will spread the Dharma in all directions and also benefit sentient beings immensely.” He then erected stupas in all four directions and blessed the earth. So, the ground of the Sakya Monastery in Tibet was blessed by Guru Padmasambhāva. This is the first special quality.

When Palden Atiśa came to Sakya and performed prostrations on the same place where Khön Konchok Gyalpo built the monastery decades later, his attendant inquired why he prostrated and

made offerings to an empty land. Atiśa responded by saying, “Don’t you see that on this grey earth there are seven letter syllables of DHI (ཨྲི), one letter syllable of HRIH (ཨྲིཿ), and one syllable of HUM (ཧཱུྃ)? That means there will be seven emanations of Mañjuśrī, the Buddha of Wisdom, an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, the Buddha of Compassion, and an emanation of Vajrapāṇi, the Buddha of Power. And in future, there will be many emanations of these three bodhisattvas, who will benefit all sentient beings immensely. This is the reason I was doing the prostrations.” And this is the second special quality.

The founder of the Sakya school, Khön Könchok Gyalpo, had a son named Sachen Kunga Nyingpo. He started training as a lama and received many teachings since young. His tutor advised, “You are the son of a great lama. You need to study. In order to study, you need wisdom. And to acquire wisdom, you will practice Mañjuśrī.” Sachen Kunga Nyingpo received the Mañjuśrī initiation and related teachings and practiced this deity in a retreat. One day, in his pure vision, Sachen saw many rainbows and flowers, and in the midst of them was Mañjuśrī seated on a throne with his feet touching the ground, and with two bodhisattvas, one on his left and the other on his right side. In his pure vision he saw three Mañjuśrīs in the sky before him. The central Mañjuśrī imparted this four-line instruction to him:

If you have attachment to this life, you are not a religious person.

If you have attachment to the realm of existence, you do not have proper renunciation.

If you have attachment to self-purpose, you do not have bodhicitta, which is the enlightened mind.

If grasping arises, you do not have the view.

These four lines contain the entire Mahāyāna teachings. He accomplished realizations and taught these lines to his sons. It was written and was passed down up until now in a continuous lineage, as a preliminary teaching for mind training. This instruction is considered to be very authentic and pure mind training teaching, not only by the Sakya school but for all the other schools, too.

Subsequently Sachen received the Lamdré teaching from his guru, Shangton Chobar. “Lam” means path, “dré” means result; and “Lamdré” means the base, path, and result, all together—they are not separate. If they are separate, then that means they are not proper to be accomplished. They have to be together; they have to be linked. He received the complete Lamdré from his guru for many years. Upon completion, the guru imparted this advice, “For eighteen years you should not give this teaching to anyone, and do not even mention its name. After eighteen years, you may either

teach to others or write it down. You can do whatever to it as you are the owner of the teaching.” Before this, Lamdré had been an oral teaching only—there was no text. Therefore, Sachen spent eighteen years in practice. However, one time, he fell ill and had to take very strong medicine. The strong medication resulted in him forgetting many of the Lamdré teaching. He felt very sad and was desperate since his guru was no longer alive and there were no other Dharma siblings, he could discuss this with. It was difficult to go to India, moreover the teaching was kept so secret that it was not easy to find, even if he were to journey to India.

Sachen prayed fervently to his guru and the teaching was revived—he started remembering the teachings. He prayed again and again, and his guru appeared as if in person to bestow the teachings to him. In this way he managed to remember most of the teachings. He continued praying and then one day Mahāsiddha Virūpa appeared. Mahāsiddha Virūpa was the abbot of Nālandā and later became a mahāsiddha. He is the original guru of Lamdré. The Lamdré lineage has five Indian gurus, and Mahāsiddha Virūpa is the first lineage guru of the Lamdré teaching. The first five lineage gurus of Lamdré are five Indian gurus, followed by several Tibetan translators. Virūpa appeared at Sakya. He was leaning toward the circle of grey earth and the whole valley was covered with his body, Virūpa announced, “This earth belongs to me!” This is the third special quality.

In brief, the first special quality of Sakya is Guru Padmasambhāva's blessing. The second special quality is the prophecy given by Atiśa. The third special quality is that Mahāsiddha Virūpa himself appeared, blessed the area, and claimed that that area belonged to him. Hence Sakya has three special qualities.



Mahāsiddha Virūpa

The Four Great Translators

“Sakyapa” means one who holds the lineage of the four great translators. Buddhism arrived from India to Tibet, hence the teachings had to come through the translators. Teachings that came from the translators are considered very pure and authentic. There were four great translators.

The first translator is Bari Lotsāwa. “Lotsāwa” means translator. “Bari” is his race. His personal name is Rinchen Dragpa. He travelled from Tibet through Nepal to India and stayed there for many years studying under the guidance of Indian masters. He received many teachings and collected them together in a book called the *Collection of Sāadhanā*. He brought many teachings back to Tibet. One of Lama Sakyapa Kunga Nyingpo’s teachers is Bari Lotsāwa.

The second translator is Drokmi Lotsāwa. As mentioned earlier, Khön Könchok Gyalpo, the founder of the Sakya school and

father of Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, consulted Drokmi Lotsāwa but Drokmi did not give teachings to more than one person at a time. Drokmi Lotsāwa's personal name is Śākya Yeshé. He was the first Tibetan lama to have received the Lamdré teachings. He gave Könchok Gyalpo many teachings, especially the Hevajra Tantra, but not the Lamdré teaching. Drokmi Lotsāwa did not give the two different types of teachings to the same person. Lamdré teaching is a pith instruction. So Drokmi Lotsāwa did not give pith instructions to those who received tantras from him. If students received teaching on tantra from him, then he did not give them pith instruction. He introduced his best disciples to the pith instruction. Lama Sakyapa Kunga Nyingpo received his Lamdré teaching from Drokmi Lotsāwa's disciple, Shangton Chobar. In this way, Lamdré is the main teaching of the Sakyapa. Lamdré is the path and result—it has everything—the sūtrayāna path, which is the preliminary part, and the Vajrayāna path that is the main part; it is a complete teaching starting from refuge up to enlightenment; how one person attains enlightenment.

The third translator is Mal Lotsāwa (not Marpa Lotsāwa). Mal Lotsāwa's name is Lodrö Dragpa. He gave an enormous number of teachings to Lama Sakyapa Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, such as the sādhanās of the deities Mahākāla and Cakrasaṃvara.

The fourth translator is Lotsāwa Rinchen Sangpo, the most important translator during this new translation period of time. Through him, Lama Sakyapa received many, many teachings.

So, the Sakya teachings mainly come from these four translators.

The Five Sakya Patriarchs



The Five Sakya Patriarchs

The Sakya Monastery was first established in 1073 by Khön Könchok Gyalpo. His son, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo widely known as the first Sakya patriarch as mentioned earlier, received the *Parting from the Four Attachment* teaching directly from Mañjuśrī and the Lamdré teaching as well as many other teachings within the one-month period from Mahāsiddha Virūpa. Lama Sakyapa had four sons. The first son, Kungabar, went to India to study and passed away there. His second son was Lopön Sönam Tsemo, known as the second Sakya patriarch. He was a very great scholar, whose fame reached even as far as the Ganges River. Sönam Tsemo wrote many books, on sūtrayāna as well as mantrayāna, and many books on ritual. The third son was Jetsün Dragpa Gyaltsen, the third Sakya patriarch. He was a very good master, especially for Lamdré teachings. In terms of Lamdré teaching, he is the most important master because, as Lamdré is a pith instruction, Lamdré has many hidden words and thus needs many detailed explanations. Jetsün Dragpa Gyaltsen was good in explaining these teachings and the real owner of all the secret teachings.

The fourth son was Palchen Opo. Palchen Opo's son is Sakya Paṇḍita, the fourth Sakya patriarch, who is very well known and was the first Tibetan to receive the full Paṇḍita title. He also wrote many treatises and commentaries, especially on Buddhist logic.

There are many Indian books translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan language. However, only Sakya Paṇḍita's books, especially on Buddhist logic, among all the books authored by other Tibetan masters, were translated back into Sanskrit. This is because Sakya Paṇḍita's books were so complete and authentic.

Sakya Paṇḍita's younger brother, Zangsta Sönam Gyaltzen, had two sons: Drogön Chögyal Phagpa, the fifth Sakya patriarch, and Drogön Chakna Dorjé.

During the Mongol Empire, Sakya Paṇḍita and Chögyal Phagpa were invited to Mainland China by the Mongol emperors. That was the first time Vajrayāna teachings were spread into Mainland China and the Mongolian region. Both Sakya Paṇḍita and his nephew Drogön Chögyal Phagpa eventually became the royal priests of the Mongol emperors. Vajrayāna Chögyal Phagpa also became the ruler of Tibet because the emperor gave all three provinces to Chögyal Phagpa as an offering. Thus, he became the first lama king in Tibet.

Moreover, Drogön Chögyal Phagpa was the one who composed the Mongolian script.

These five great masters are widely known as the five Sakya patriarchs: Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, Lopön Sönam Tsemo, Jetsün Dragpa Gyaltzen, Sakya Paṇḍita, and Chögyal Phagpa.

The Nine Great Sakya Scholars and Masters

The Sakya school has many, many great scholars, of whom there were nine exceptionally great scholars. There were three great scholars who were very capable in explaining the sūtrayāna path.

The first great scholar was Yagton Sangye Pal. He was considered as the emanation of Lord Maitreya, the coming buddha. He wrote several commentaries on Lord Maitreya's teachings.

The second great scholar was Rongton Sheja Kunrig. He was another brilliant scholar and wrote many books. It is said that whenever he gave teachings, a fragrance pervaded the air, a shower of flowers fell from the sky, and rainbows appeared.

The third great scholar was Rendawa Shunu Lodrö. He specialized in the Madhyamaka philosophy, the Middle Way school. He wrote many books on Madhyamaka. Rendawa Shunu Lodrö was also the main teacher of Lama Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelug school. Lama Tsongkhapa studied under Rendawa for many years.

There were three great masters who are especially good in mantrayāna.

Sakya has three subschools: the Ngor, the Tsar, and the Dzong. The first great master is Ngorchén Kunga Zangpo, the founder of the Ngor, the Sakya subschool. Ngorchén was a truly great master. His name was clearly mentioned in many sūtras by the Buddha, who predicted that in a certain time there would be a bhikṣu called Kunga Zangpo who would spread the teachings of the Buddha and would have great discipline in keeping the vināya rules.

The second great mantrayāna master was Tsarchen Losel Gyatso, the founder of the Tsarpa subschool. Tsarchen is also a great master. From a very young age, he had great specialty. He gave extensive teachings and also wrote many commentaries, especially the most uncommon teachings of the Sakya order and all the other schools—he was the owner of them.

The third great master was Dorjé Denpa Kunga Namgyal, the founder of Dzongpa subschool. He was also a very great scholar.

There are three other masters who were accomplished in both sūtrayāna and mantrayāna.

The first master was Gorampa Sönam Gyaltzen, who was a very great scholar and wrote many books. Today most of our philosophical

studies in colleges use his texts. He was excellent in providing detailed explanations on both sūtrayāna and mantrayāna teachings.

Another master was Śākya Chokden. He was a very great master and wrote many books. He had a very sharp mind and gave the most authentic and profound teachings in a detailed manner.

The third one was Tagtsang Lotsāwa. He was not only a great scholar, but a great translator who brought many important texts into the Tibetan language and also wrote many important commentaries.

Through many great masters and scholars, the unbroken lineage of the Sakya teachings has been transmitted up until now. Masters from other schools who are very honest and straightforward praise the Sakyapas. For example, the Great Fifth Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso wrote, “Tibet has many great scholars just like the sun and moon, but the one who explained the sūtra and mantra as well as all the related sciences fully, are those born in the Khön lineage such as Sakya Paṇḍita. Many great scholars can explain part of the teachings, some can explain the sūtrayāna, mantrayāna, or the related sciences, but no one can explain all of these together well and completely, except those born in the Khön lineage, such as Sakya Paṇḍita.”

This is a very brief explanation of the Sakya tradition. But I feel that all the traditions that exist today—first in terms of their

motivation of the enlightened mind and then their main practice in the combination of sūtra and mantra together, and their final accomplishment, which is the ultimate enlightenment—have no differences. All are the same. The lineage is the only difference, from their original Indian gurus to how the teachings have been passed down to different translators, and then to how they have been translated and so on. These are the only differences. Because of these differences, some schools place more emphasis on meditation and practice, some schools rely more on studies, while some schools emphasize both, and so on. Otherwise, there is no difference; all are the same. For example, all deities are the same. All the buddhas in terms of their wisdom, compassion, and power are all the same, but due to our own karmic connection, certain deities can be accomplished more quickly, while certain deities may take a longer time. Because if you do not have the karmic connection and practice, then it may take a long time to achieve results. Yet if you have a karmic connection with a specific deity and practice, then you can accomplish it quickly.

Therefore, buddhas also manifest in different forms: some deities are very peaceful, while some are very wrathful; some appear in passionate union with a consort; some are very simple, for example, with one face and two hands; some deities have many faces and hands. But they are all the same. Because of our own personalities, affinities, and karmic connections, there

is a need for various forms. Therefore, there are many deities. Similarly, different schools are necessary: Sakyapa, Nyingmapas, Kagyupas, Gelugpas ... for certain people this school is more suitable while for some people another school is more suitable.

One may ask, if they are all the same, why do we need so many? This is necessary because the way you approach it is different, but the final accomplishment is the same. When you have different approaches, then differences arise. Sometimes, there are debates, too. It is only because the ultimate truth is so subtle and difficult to comprehend that it has to be explained in many ways with many examples and logical reasons. Yet the final conclusion and accomplishment are the same—all are buddhas' own activities. It is only due to our own affinity that there are different schools and traditions.

In *The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems* by a recent great master, Thuken Losang Chökyi Nyima, he explains the Sakyapa's view. In this book, he clearly mentions that although Tibet has many different major and minor schools, the major schools such as Nyingmapa, Kagyupa, Sakyapa, and Gelugpa have different usage of terms and approaches, but their final conclusion and accomplishment are all the same. There are debates sometimes, because the ultimate truth is so difficult to comprehend and understand, it has to be presented in many ways, and one of the ways is through debate. The final accomplishment is the same

because every school not only has great masters and great scholars but also highly realized masters. If something is wrong, then these masters cannot be highly realized. Since every school produces highly realized masters, this proves that every school is authentic, and their final accomplishment is the same.

But as I said earlier, our karmic affinity makes the difference. Buddha himself did not say “You should become a Buddhist” or “Buddhism is the best.” Buddha is the only teacher who said that “You should not take my teachings by faith, but by reasons.” He said, “You have to use your intelligence, the same way as you test the gold that you want to buy; you want to make sure the gold is genuine, you burn, cut, and scratch the material to prove that it is genuine. Similarly, you should test and analyze my teachings in the same way that you buy gold.” I think Buddha is the only teacher who has spoken this way; no other lords or teachers have said this. Buddha did not say he would save you or bless you. He said you should test it yourself.

In Buddhism, your own mind, intelligence, and wisdom are very important. You should examine and test yourself, and then once you are convinced that it is a genuine teaching, only then will you choose it as your religion and act according to the teachings. But at the same time, you must respect all the other schools and traditions, because everyone is trying to help mankind.

Lamdré

The main and most important Sakya teaching is Lamdré. Lamdré is taught through the four authenticities: authentic teachers, authentic Buddha's words (sermons), authentic commentaries and teachings, and authentic experience. Lamdré is taught with these four authenticities, and the main sequence of how you receive teachings from your teacher, then spend time in your own study, contemplation, and meditation, are the same, although other aspects—such as how it was originated, how it was translated, and how you practice—may be different. Through meditation, you gain special experience. When you gain special experience, you are convinced that your teacher is authentic. Because if your teacher is not authentic, you cannot have such wonderful experiences. You then establish that your teacher is authentic. The teaching he or she bestows is also authentic because the commentary is given by Mahāsiddha Virūpa and ancient masters. Therefore, you are convinced that it is authentic. That is also based on the Buddha's words; hence it is also authentic.

So, first, through gaining authentic experience by yourself, you can establish that your guru, the teaching, and the Buddha's words are all authentic. In this way, the four authenticities are established.

Whatever religious belief you choose, you choose it yourself, and then you practice. Once you start your practice, you should not jump here and there. You have to continue until you are accomplished and until you gain experience. As you gain experience, then you will gain more and more aspiration and inspiration to practice more.

In this way, I try to present the brief history of Sakya and also the teachings. If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer.

Questions and Answers

Q: When I am in an ordinary situation in New York City with the great number of people here, I always feel I need some help in developing patience with myself and patience with other people. Sometimes I experience fear, confusion, and even hatred and, on the spot, I am not able to be fully compassionate with my words and actions. I wonder what your advice for this may be.

A: Yes, of course, it is difficult to develop patience and compassion in big cities like New York City. Everything is difficult at the beginning. But when you try once, then as you do it, everything will become easier. On one hand, we feel it is difficult to do so with many people. But on the other hand, if there are no people, how can we practice patience and compassion? The main point is you need to remember the consequences that you will face if you indulge in impatience, anger, jealousy, and so on, and what benefit you will gain if you practice love, compassion, tolerance, and so on. Remembering these benefits and consequences again and again will definitely help to improve your meditation.

Q: The first person I read about in Tibetan Buddhism is Yeshe Tsogyal, Padmasambhāva's consort. She was very adamant about practicing as a woman. That was fabulous. That led me to wonder and to ask questions about everything. I am wondering about the world of women in the Sakya history. I have been lucky to get teachings from your sister, for instance. If you could say anything about the role of women in the Sakya tradition.

A: Actually, the Buddha himself has given equal rights to all—men and women, high and low, there is no difference, everyone is a human being, everyone has the right to practice. For example, the Buddha gave the bhikṣu and bhikṣuni vows, the full-pledge ordinations of Buddhist monks and nuns. Similarly, bodhisattvayāna and mantrayāna are of no difference. But due to circumstances, both cultural and of countries' traditions, there are more male practitioners than female. But in fact, as I mentioned before, the first Tibetan master to receive the full Lamdré teaching is Drokmi Lotsāwa. He had seven most important disciples; out of these, four were women. They were in the beginning very ordinary women, not nuns, not religious people, but Drokmi saw through his wisdom that these people had a chance to ripen their karma. These are the fully realized yoginīs. There are many yoginīs in the lineage. One recent one was my own grandaunt; her name was Pema Trinley. She was born in 1874 and passed away in 1947. She was a very great master and received many “high” visions.

I vaguely remember her funeral like a dream, but I do not remember her in life. Everyone respected her as a great teacher. We are trying to compile biographies of some of the most important female practitioners so that people will know about them.

Q: I was wondering if you have any advice for those who aspire to teach the Dharma.

A: Buddha himself described many qualifications of the teachers, such as vināya teachers, sūtrayāna teachers, and mantrayāna teachers, just as we have different school teachers like kindergarten teachers, elementary school teachers, and college teachers. Kindergarten and college teachers are different. Likewise, in Dharma you have teachers of many different levels of teachings. And each of them has different qualifications. But generally speaking, three qualifications are absolutely necessary: wisdom—one has to know fully what one is going to teach; one has to have good discipline and good moral conduct; one has to have compassion and the ability to accept disciples.

Q: You said the distinction of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism is based on whether one is emphasizing studies or practices. So, what emphasis is the Sakya school based on?

A: The Sakya school emphasizes both studies and meditation, because first you have to study; without studying you cannot meditate. The purpose of study is to meditate. So, the Sakya school emphasizes both sides.

Q: From your experience, is there consciousness that continues after one dies?

A: First you have the body and consciousness. The body is something you can see and measure, and you can describe its shape, size, colors, and so on. But mind or consciousness is not something you can see with your eyes or touch with your hands. Although this body will be disposed of one way or another, the consciousness cannot be cremated, buried, or disposed—it continues. When we die, the consciousness remains in our body for a while. If you are a practitioner, through the dissolution of elements, everyone experiences glimpses of the clear light.

But people who lack the practice cannot recognize and instead become unconscious. Practitioners have some idea about meditation and are able to recognize and remain in meditation at that time. So when the consciousness leaves the body, the body decays and the consciousness leaves for another part of the world or universe, either going through the bardo or taking rebirth in higher or lower realms.

Q: During Rinpoche's lecture, if I am not mistaken, I heard that Lamdré was taught by Shangton Chobar to Sachen Kunga Nyingpo. The teacher told the disciple not to share the teachings for 18 years. I want to know the reason behind that.

A: Because it is such a precious teaching. It had to ripen at the right time. The Buddha himself, too, after he attained enlightenment, did not give the teachings straightaway. He said, "I have found the nectar-like teaching, but I will not disclose it to anyone because no one can comprehend it." Lord Brahman then offered a golden Dharma wheel with a thousand spokes and only then did Buddha turn the wheel of Dharma. Similarly, Lamdré is so precious, it has to be ripened at the right time and given to the right people, who can comprehend it.

Q: My wife takes care of me, all my medical and psychological issues, covering all of my needs, making everything perfect for me. But I am the type who likes to space out, I want to have my own time and space to do my own thing. She is a wonderful person, but I can hardly move anywhere without her because I am closely supervised. I wonder what advice you could give us.

A: I remember you both very clearly. I am happy to see you again here. It all depends on what we call the “interdependence of origination.” Everything is dependent on each other. We are born through dependence, we remain in dependence, and we also end in dependence. Every life experience that we have is through the causes and conditions that have to be gathered together.

Q: When you were talking about the importance of forming your own experience and connection to the Dharma through the practice, I was wondering if there are some solutions when you have doubts about your own practice of the Dharma and how one might act, when doubt is an obscuration?

A: Yes, doubt is a major obstacle. So, when you first meet the teacher, you should not go straight to receive teachings from him

or her, you have to examine them. In the olden times, there were special texts mentioning the criteria for examining the potential disciples from the guru's side, as well as how to examine the potential guru from the disciples' side. After examining carefully, you can then start to attend the teachings. Once you establish the guru-disciple link, an authentic guru can give you the teaching. Right at the beginning, of course, you cannot yield any results because from beginningless time until now we are caught up in saṃsāra, we have so many shortcomings, we have so many negative emotions. It is not easy. But if you try, you will certainly improve. As you improve, your doubt will also disappear.

Q: For example, in thangkas, we often see certain deity depicted in an extremely specific position and posture. When we are generating a deity in ourselves, do we have to be in the exact position like the thangka? Are we able to make some changes or do we have to be fixated in that particular position and posture?

A: The postures of the deities have different meanings. But you do not have to physically position yourself exactly like that. Mind is the most important—mentally you visualize yourself as the deity in this particular position.

Q: In the West, do we have a different type of obstacle to understanding and applying the Dharma and being connected with the world in reality? Do you see a particular Western obstacle that is different from the obstacles that Asians encounter?

A: No, I do not think so—after all, we all are the same. We are all human beings. Our needs and obstacles are the same. But one thing that might be different is that, since Buddhism has been very well established in the East, especially in Tibet and the Himalayan region, even though the people there may not have much knowledge, they have strong belief about cause and result, karmic connection, and so on. As for the West, Buddhism is fairly new and has not been widely spread, so you do not have this kind of base. But you do have more wisdom in the sense that everyone studies and has more knowledge, you have more logical reasoning instead of faith. Through logical reasoning, you need to be convinced about the practice.

Q: Do you get angry? If so, how do you deal with it?

A: Of course, I am also a human being, like everyone else. I do not claim I am superior. Whenever I get angry, I try to remember the consequences I will face. By indulging in anger, one will face very severe consequences.



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

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



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