



# Way of the Buddha

H.H. the Sakya Trichen (the 41<sup>st</sup> Sakya Trizin)



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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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## Every Sentient Being Possesses Buddha Nature

**L**ord Buddha has given many teachings for the benefit of all sentient beings. Since all sentient beings have differing mentalities, propensities, and defilements, they need many different types of teachings, just as different types of medicine are needed to treat different diseases. Thus, in Tibetan Buddhism we have four major schools, which are all a reflection of Buddha's activity.

Every sentient being possesses buddha nature. For this reason, everyone—if they work hard—can become a buddha. At the moment, we cannot recognize our buddha nature because it is covered up with defilements and illusions. These defilements and illusions are not the nature of mind; they are outside it and only temporary. Therefore, by using the right method, we can eliminate them and become enlightened.

In our human life, we have many requirements. We need a place to live, food to eat, clothes to wear, and medical care. However, the most important of all is our Dharma practice because whatever

worldly power or worth that we have, it is only beneficial until we die. The longest we may live is about one-hundred years. After that, we lose everything, including our precious body: the body for which we care so much, which we have had with us from our first day on earth. Many people think that after death there is nothing. However, those people don't have logic on their side. They deny the existence of anything after death because they cannot see it at present. Indeed, there are many logical reasons for believing in rebirth. Mind is not a thing that can just disappear, be burnt, be thrown away, or be smashed. You cannot hold on to the mind. You cannot destroy it. So, when we leave this body, the mind is not going to be burnt, buried, thrown in the ocean, or eaten by animals. Although the body itself will be dismantled one day, our consciousness or mind—since it is not a substance—will not disappear. It has to continue, so there is life after death. And at the time of death, only our previous Dharma practice will help us.

Even in this life, there is a vast difference between those who practice Dharma and those who do not. People who do not believe in anything other than this physical world appear to be happy. But when they face tragedy, they cannot cope with it. However, the spiritual person, when beset by tragedy and suffering, will remember the Buddha's basic teachings, known as the four seals.



## Buddha's Basic Teachings: Four Seals

**F**irst, all compounded phenomena—anything that arises through causes and conditions—are impermanent. Powerful persons become weak, healthy people become sick, and rich people become poor. Everything is impermanent. So when Buddhists come into contact with these situations, they recognize them as a sign of impermanence, and that is faith.

Second, Buddha said that everything that has defilements is suffering. So when Buddhists are faced with tragedy, they know that the nature of *samsāra* is suffering—just as the nature of fire is hot, whether it is a small or big fire. The different realms of existence—the realms of the hells, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demigods, and gods—all have different types of suffering. Some, of course, have more visible suffering, whereas others have subtle suffering. But it is all suffering. We can learn this from the scriptures and we can also experience this very clearly in our own human life. No matter where you live—whether you are in a developed or an underdeveloped country—there is no real satisfaction or happiness. There is always some kind of

problem and there is always suffering.

Especially when facing tragedy, the person who has spiritual practice will realize that suffering is inevitable and so will have a readiness to face the situation. This readiness lessens the burden on the mind. When the mental burden is less then, of course, physical suffering is naturally less because mind is like a boss, and the body is like a servant. When the mind is happy, even if you are in the poorest country or conditions, then you are happy. However, if your mind is not happy, even if you are in the heavenly realms, you are not happy.

Third, Buddha said that all phenomena are selfless. In other words, although we all cling to a self, actually there is no personal self there. We always say ‘my body’ or ‘my mind’—but where is the mind itself? It has to be either in the body or mind, or in between, or somewhere external, but you cannot find it. So, all beings lack a personal self. The same is true about external phenomena, like tables and flowers. If you examine their components you cannot find any part that is inherently the thing itself. Thus, all phenomena are selfless.

Fourth, Buddha said nirvāṇa is peace. Nirvāṇa is when all suffering is completely exhausted. Hence, the special characteristic of a Buddhist is that he or she assents to these four basic teachings, known as the four seals: (1) everything is impermanent; (2) everything is suffering; (3) everything is selfless; and (4) nirvāṇa is peace.

## Becoming a Buddhist: Taking Refuge

**I**n addition, to become a Buddhist, one must go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. This is so because in order to cross the ocean of suffering and reach nirvāṇa, or the enlightened state, one needs to take refuge—just as, if you go to an unknown country, you need a guide to show you the path, you need the path, and you need companions to help you accomplish a long and difficult journey. Similarly, when traveling the Buddhist path, the guide is the Buddha and the Dharma is the path to follow to reach the destination. However, you cannot just have someone tell you how to get there, you have to actually travel there yourself. That is why the Buddha taught that you are your own savior because you have to practice Dharma yourself to reach the goal. The Sangha are the companions who are traveling along the same path to the same destination and who can help you reach the goal.

It is not enough just to know Dharma intellectually, since to know it and experience it are two different things. In order to experience Dharma from the inside, you have to study and think about it all the time. Many people say it is difficult to practice Dharma

in modern society because life is very busy and there are so many disturbances. But Dharma does not mean just reciting mantras and meditating alone. The most important sense of the word *dharma* is to change our present worldly mind into a spiritual mind. You can do this while you are travelling, while you are working, or while talking with your friends. Once you gain a little experience of Dharma then everything you do actually becomes a teaching. For example, when you are traveling, you see so many people, you see things changing, and you see suffering. That is already an experience of Dharma because when things are changing that is the teaching of impermanence. When you see suffering, you realize that the whole of saṃsāra is suffering. In this way, Dharma is actually something to be practiced mentally wherever you go or whatever you do. Everything can be turned into Dharma practice. For example, a rule associated with Buddhist refuge is that wherever you go, you should think of the Buddha of that particular direction. So that means that wherever you go, you think about Buddha. Further, when you see people suffering, you can practice compassion. If you meet people who make you angry or who disturb you, then you have the chance to practice patience. So even the busiest man in the busiest city can turn every day, every moment into Dharma practice.

In ancient India and Tibet, the Dharma kings were all householders and undertook many worldly activities. But at the same time, they were all very great Dharma practitioners.

However, if your mind does not change, even if you stay in a very secluded place, then you cannot become a good Dharma practitioner. The main point to remember is that everything is mind. To have a kind mind is the root of all Dharma, particularly the Mahāyāna path. After taking refuge in Dharma one should not harm any sentient being intentionally.

## Developing the Mahāyāna Motivation: Bodhicitta

**M**ahāyāna Buddhists should not only refrain from harming sentient beings but should strive to benefit them as well. This comes from having a good mind. A kind mind, a kind heart is the root of the Mahāyāna path. Every sentient being, from the most intelligent human to tiny insects, has the wish to be free from suffering and to have happiness. Therefore, to think of oneself alone is wrong because oneself is just one person and other sentient beings are many. Between one and many, many is more important. If you consider only yourself alone, you will not obtain happiness. Because when one is selfish, there is always jealousy and competitiveness. All sorts of impure thoughts arise, which bring suffering in this life and in future lives. However, happiness is experienced by those who do not care about themselves but only about others. Throughout history, even on a worldly level, good or great people have obtained their good name through caring for others.

In the same way, if you wish to have happiness, then you must strive for the happiness of others. The root of all Mahāyāna teaching is

loving-kindness and compassion. When you have these two, you have the seed from which enlightenment will grow. However, just to have compassion and loving-kindness is not enough to become enlightened. One must actually generate the bodhicitta aspiration to become a buddha in order to rescue sentient beings from suffering. Yet at present, we are not free, we are caught up in defilements and illusions. With such a mind we cannot help others. We must therefore become enlightened because even a single moment of enlightenment can calm sentient beings.





## **Buddhist Paths: Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Mantrayāna**

**O**f course, to become enlightened, you need to enter the Dharma path. Although the Dharma path includes many different teachings, we can divide these teachings into the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. The Mahāyāna is for those who follow the greater goal and the Hīnayāna is for those who follow the lesser goal. Within the Mahāyāna, there are the cause-oriented Mahāyāna and result-oriented Mantrayāna. The Mantrayāna is the highest of the Buddha's teachings. To enter this path, we need to receive initiations. There are different types of initiations for the various deities set forth in the tantras. Generally speaking, there are two types of deities. Deities such as Hevajra and Cakrasaṃvara enable us to accomplish excellent siddhis, which means ultimate enlightenment. Through the practice of minor deities, we can accomplish common siddhis such as purifying negativity and obstacles; and increasing our life, wisdom, and merit—providing the means from which we can then accomplish the excellent siddhis.

By practicing meditation on deities through which one can accomplish excellent siddhis, the main purpose is to become enlightened.

With the deities through which one can accomplish common siddhis, the purpose is to overcome obstacles and difficult challenges.

The most important common siddhi is to increase our life because if we do not have a long life then we cannot accomplish our practice. It is therefore very important to practice meditations on long-life deities. There are outer, inner, and secret methods to achieve longevity. The outer method is to do good activities, such as to rescue beings who are going to be killed. Inner practices are taking medicine and so forth. The secret methods are meditations on long-life deities. The most well-known of long-life deities is Buddha Amitāyus.

-The End-





■ 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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