



Buddha's Teachings: Kind Heart and Clear Mind

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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A Genuine Kind Heart

Buddha Shakyamuni has performed many noble activities to lead all sentient beings from suffering and dissatisfaction to temporary and ultimate happiness. Of these noble activities, Buddha's main activity is turning the wheel of Dharma. Buddha said, "I have shown the path to liberation, but whether one achieves liberation or not depends on oneself." Buddha is our guide who shows the right path versus the wrong path. One will achieve liberation or enlightenment by following the right path, but will incur severe consequences by following the wrong path. Buddha said that oneself is one's own savior, and oneself is one's own enemy. Whether one achieves liberation, therefore, depends mainly on one's own efforts. Whether one achieves genuine happiness or experiences more suffering depends on one's own actions, mental attitude, and motivation.

If one cultivates a kind heart and clear mind, one will progress on the path and achieve temporary and ultimate results. But without a kind heart and clear mind, one will experience more and more suffering.

Buddha's teachings are a method that makes a bad person become good. His teachings transform negative thoughts to positive ones, ordinary thoughts to wisdom, and ordinary beings to enlightened beings. We practice through our body, speech, and mind. But mainly, we must practice through our mind. If we practice with physical or verbal conduct yet our mind is distracted, our practice will not have a strong impact or great results. Our mental actions help us achieve the main result—liberation.

Good mental actions result from having a kind heart and clear mind. There are different levels, however, to having a kind heart. Everyone has a kind heart to some degree. Even non-believers have a kind heart, such as the wish to save lives, to help children, or to help those suffering from sickness. Also, someone may wish to help hundreds or thousands of people, or a hundred thousand people.

According to Buddha's teachings, a kind heart does not just involve helping hundreds, thousands, or millions of people. It means to help infinite sentient beings without any limits—based on loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta. This type of kind heart focuses on all sentient beings—not only beings in this world, but also those who are not visible, those in the lower realms, and the demi-gods and gods. All of them are the objects of a kind heart. This type of kind heart is very profound and great. It has infinite objects of its loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta.

If we have a genuine kind heart, then naturally we will control our negative thoughts, such as those involving anger, attachment, jealousy, competition, or bias. This is because when one has a genuine kind heart, one does not differentiate among sentient beings.

A genuine kind heart cares for all beings, irrespective of their culture, race, religion, language, or other differences. It has no boundaries; it extends to all without any discrimination or exception. Having this type of kind heart is important not only in past centuries or at the present, but also will be important in the future. Regardless of time period, and whether we live in modern times or not, we all need peace and harmony. And we all wish for happiness. The source of peace and happiness is a kind, good, and positive heart.



So, we need this genuine kind heart all the time. Many of our problems and sufferings are caused by our own way of thinking. If we have a kind heart, then our thinking can change. We will have a more positive mindset. When we think positively and cultivate a genuine kind heart, we can overcome many sufferings, worries, and problems. Therefore, a kind heart is very important.

A kind heart makes us a better person or a person without excessive stress and suffering. Even when faced with great challenges, those with a kind heart will not be affected. They will have a peaceful mind, unaffected by outer or external challenges. This type of kind heart is the cause for happiness and helps overcome suffering.

Anger Is the Root of Many Negative Actions

Our suffering and problems are caused by our own negative thoughts and actions. For example, if we have negative thoughts against our family members, then there will be disharmony. There will be quarrelling, arguments, and unhappiness among family members. All these problems are caused by negative thoughts and by not having a true kind heart to others. If we have a kind heart, then we will not quarrel, argue, or hate each other. A family can live harmoniously, and this harmony can be extended to neighbors and others. Eventually, one can live harmoniously with anyone, at any time. But to have harmony, we must have a kind heart.

Actually, being angry at one's family is more serious than being angry with others. We usually live with, or otherwise interact with, our family more often than with others. The more frequently we argue with or are angry at those closest to us, the more serious negative actions we will accumulate, which in turn causes us to experience more suffering. If we are angry at someone outside our family, we might not see that person very often, so we will not be angry at that person every day.

But if we are angry at our family, there is a greater chance to feel angry every day or very often. The angrier we are, the more negative actions we commit. Hence, it is said to be more serious, and can lead to more negative results, if we are angry at our family.

We therefore should begin our practice of having a kind heart with our own family. In this way, we can live harmoniously with our family and then extend this harmony to others.

If we live together in harmony, then there is less chance for us to be angry. Without anger, there are no negative actions caused by anger. So, by controlling anger, one can control not only anger itself but also many negative actions committed physically or verbally, because many negative actions are caused by anger.

Anger is the root of many negative actions. If we control or subdue the root, then naturally we can control other negative actions caused by this root. The best way to control our negative thoughts, such as anger and jealousy, is to have a kind heart inseparable from loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta.

If we have a genuine kind heart, then we can help bring more peace in this world. Peace comes from a peaceful mind. We cannot make world peace out of anger. We cannot make this a peaceful world through negative thoughts. We can help make this world more peaceful only through a peaceful mind. A peaceful mind is the solution.

Anger will not create peace and will not solve our problems. Anger will always cause more problems, sufferings, stress, and unhappiness. Someone filled with anger will be unhappy. Those who are the objects of someone's anger will also be unhappy. So, anger destroys the happiness of both oneself and others. It causes suffering for both oneself and others. We should contemplate and come to understand that anger is our enemy that destroys our peace, happiness, and positive thoughts.

Cultivating a Kind Heart and Clear Mind

To control negative thoughts, we first must learn what a genuine kind heart really is about. Buddha's teachings, however, are not for mere intellectual knowledge. An intellectual understanding alone will not control our negative thoughts. We must know what it means to have a kind heart, and, after learning, we must practice. Real practice can control our negative thoughts. But even with our practice, we must gain experience. When we gain experience then we can really subdue our negative thoughts. This experience can be called the clear mind. So with the right knowledge, we can practice. Then, with proper practice, we can gain inner realization or experience—that is, the clear mind.

There is a cause and result relationship between our knowledge and practice, and our practice and experience. So, our study, practice, and experience must be linked together. Otherwise, there will not be a big impact. Without applying our knowledge or putting it into action, our practice will not have good results. And without good practice, our experience will be lacking.

There are different types or levels of clear mind gained through

listening to teachings, and through our study, contemplation, and meditation. Here, we mean the clear mind or wisdom that realizes the true nature of all phenomena. Based on the wisdom acquired by listening to and contemplating the teachings, we can achieve the wisdom of meditation or experience. This type of wisdom is equally important to having a kind heart. Although having a kind heart will help us control negative thoughts, a kind heart alone will not eliminate negative thoughts. To eliminate negative thoughts, we must achieve the clear mind or wisdom that realizes selflessness. Only through such realization can we eliminate mental afflictions and negative emotions.

This clear mind or wisdom is very important because to eliminate suffering, we must eliminate the root of suffering: self-cherishing or selfish thoughts. Self-cherishing is the root of all suffering and problems in saṃsāra or cyclic existence; it is the source of all our negative thoughts and emotions. Self-cherishing can be eliminated by achieving the clear mind that realizes selflessness.

Wishing happiness for oneself is not the cause of happiness; it is the cause of suffering. In his text *Bodhicaryāvatāra (Entering the Bodhisattva's Way of Life)*, the great Indian master Śāntideva said: "Whatever happiness there is in this world all comes from wanting others to be happy. Whatever suffering there is in this world all comes from wanting one's own happiness."

In this world, people are very busy with their lives. When they seek happiness based on self-cherishing, they never achieve

genuine results or real happiness. Instead, they experience more suffering. Some may think that happiness can be achieved by simply developing or improving the material world, but this is not the case. In the last few decades, there has been great material improvements, but people are not necessarily happier nowadays compared to a few decades ago. This shows that real happiness comes from inner development, not just through outer or material development. We must develop our own mind—our own inner world. To develop this inner world, we must achieve a clear mind—the wisdom that knows how to overcome suffering and how to gain genuine happiness, not for oneself alone but for all sentient beings without any exception.

Buddha's teachings are not for only oneself. In particular, we cannot practice any of the Mahāyāna teachings for only oneself. Rather, we must practice for the sake of all sentient beings. We must practice not just for the sake of fellow Buddhists, but for those who follow other religions or no religion as well. We must practice with the wish to help all humans and animals in this world, and extend that motivation to include all beings in saṃsāra.

Further, Buddha's teachings are not for just preserving one religion or keeping one tradition. They are practiced for the sake of everyone, and everyone can practice Buddha's teachings irrespective of differences such as nationality, race, or culture. Everyone can practice Buddha's teachings because each one of us has buddha nature—the potential or seed to become a buddha. Since everyone has this chance, our practice must include all beings, leaving no one out.

To become a buddha, our practice must include two fields of merit. First, there is the field of the buddhas and sublime beings as our guides and objects of refuge. Second, there is the field of sentient beings. Without focusing on sentient beings, we cannot practice proper refuge, loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta—let alone become a buddha. For example, when we practice refuge, we recite: “I and all sentient beings go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.” We also recite the four limitless meditations: “May all sentient beings have happiness and the cause of happiness” and so forth. To cultivate bodhicitta, we recite: “For the sake of all sentient beings, I must attain the stage of a buddha; for this purpose, I will practice this profound path.”

So, without focusing on sentient beings, we cannot practice any of the fundamental Mahāyāna teachings. Sentient beings are not an obstacle to our Dharma practice. They are the field and focus of our practice. It is very important to know that we need sentient beings to practice. We must bring our focus to include all sentient beings.

Without having a clear mind, we cannot practice any of the six perfections. In Sanskrit, the term for perfection is *pāramitā*, which means to go beyond. *Pāramitā* means to go beyond *saṃsāra*. To go beyond *saṃsāra*, we need a clear mind or wisdom, which is known as the sixth perfection. Without the perfection of wisdom, we cannot go beyond or gain liberation from *saṃsāra*. The other five perfections—generosity, morality, patience, joyful vigor, and meditation—are not perfections without wisdom.

The perfection of wisdom is the most important perfection. It is like the eyes to see the path to achieve liberation or enlightenment. Although one has feet to walk, one cannot go forward without eyes to see the path.

In the *Madhyamakāvatāra (Introduction to the Middle Way)*, the great Indian master Candrakīrti said we need two wings. As an analogy, swans fly with two wings to cross the ocean or a river. Likewise, we need the two wings of method and wisdom—a kind heart and clear mind—to cross the ocean of saṃsāra. Both are important. With both, there is no doubt that we can overcome all suffering and problems. We can gain liberation, go beyond saṃsāra, and attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings.

As I mentioned earlier, we must first acquire knowledge about what it means to have a kind heart and clear mind, and then we must apply that knowledge to our daily life and put it into action. If we have knowledge but do not apply it, then this knowledge is not so useful. There is the same principle even as to mundane knowledge. So, we must connect our knowledge and practice. In turn, this will allow us to develop a connection between our practice and experience, enabling us to gain inner realization that tames our mind.

A kind heart and clear mind are none other than our own mind. We can train our mind by cultivating a kind heart and clear mind, and mind training is most important. If we have a positive mind, then we will perform positive physical and verbal actions. A positive mind will not motivate us to commit any negative actions.

It will always motivate us to perform positive actions. Whether we perform positive physical and verbal actions depends on whether we have a positive mind. Until we have a genuine, positive mind all the time, we need to practice, to improve ourselves, and to train ourselves.

The best way to train ourselves is to be mindful and alert all the time. If we are not mindful, then we might commit negative actions. When we are not mindful, we sometimes make hasty decisions that turn out wrong. There is the potential to commit many negative actions based on a wrong decision that was made hastily—without being mindful and alert. Therefore, it is important to be mindful and alert all the time, so that positive thoughts will be like a reminder or guide to prevent us from committing negative actions. Positive thoughts can help us follow the right path and perform proper actions according to Buddha's teachings.

Moreover, having a kind heart and clear mind also means that we should perform all our actions with the right motivation. If we have a genuine kind heart, then there is no chance for us to generate a wrong intention or mundane intention. If we have a mundane intention to practice Dharma, then we lack a kind heart. According to Buddha's teachings, a kind heart is inseparable from loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta. It is none other than these positive thoughts. If we have this kind heart, then naturally it will pacify mundane intentions. It also will help us have a wider outlook and think positively, and it will make us a wise person.

As a beginner on the path, our so-called clear mind is none other than our thoughts. But as we develop our practice, we will cut through our thoughts. The clear mind then arises as non-conceptual wisdom.

A kind heart and clear mind are the medicine that cures our sickness or afflictive emotions that cause suffering. For example, when one is sick, one needs to take medicine. Asking others to take medicine will not cure one's own sickness. Similarly, to cure one's own afflictive emotions, one must cultivate a kind heart and clear mind. We all need to practice. We all need to develop positive thoughts to cure our own sickness or negative thoughts. In this way, we will progress on the path. This is like the root or the base. If the root is strong, good, and positive, then we will have positive development and obtain a kind heart and clear mind.

Questions and Answers

Question: Why do you say that attachment is a negative thought? Isn't attachment normal since we care about each other?

Answer: Caring for others is positive, but attachment is not caring for all beings. Attachment is based on biased thoughts because we do not have attachment to everyone. We have attachment to some but not to all seven billion people in this world. But when we genuinely care for others, it means that we care for all without any discrimination. When we have attachment, however, our mind is narrow. We do not extend our loving-kindness and compassion to all. This attachment then causes more negative actions. Sometimes, out of attachment, we get angry. For example, if someone has strong attachment to certain food and wants to eat it immediately but has to wait for it, then he or she may become angry. Likewise, attachment can cause us to commit negative physical or verbal actions against others. This attachment is based on discriminatory thoughts and can cause us to generate more negative thoughts and commit more negative actions.



Question: The suffering I have endured since childhood has been like a mark made by iron on my skin. How can I free myself of this suffering?

Answer: The nature of mind is clear or pure since beginningless time. All these negative thoughts are temporary. They are not the nature of mind. They are like dirt on a white cloth. The dirt is not the nature of the cloth; it is temporary. If we use the right remedy like soap and water, then the dirt can be removed from the cloth. Similarly, negative thoughts are not like an iron mark on us. They can be removed with the right remedy, that is, the right teaching and practice. If we can remove negative thoughts, then we can remove all suffering because suffering is caused by negative thoughts. So, one should not be discouraged. One should think that all suffering is impermanent. Suffering can be removed. It is good to recall that negative thoughts are not the nature of our mind.

In the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva explained that even insects, if they develop the power of effort, can become a buddha. In other words, with the right effort in practice and bodhicitta, even insects can become a buddha. Then why can't we? As humans, we know what conduct is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned. For us, there is no need to mention that we also can become a buddha. So, we should not be discouraged. We should be encouraged by the Buddha's teachings and the methods he has shown us.

Question: Is clear mind the same as pure mind?

Answer: If we are referring to natural pure mind, then it is not the same as clear mind. Natural pure mind is possessed by all sentient beings since beginningless time. Because of that, all are said to have buddha nature. On the other hand, clear mind refers to the wisdom achieved through study, contemplation, and meditation on the right teachings. Through such practice, we achieve the double purity of a buddha. This double purity is both the natural purity of our mind and the purity of being free from all obscurations. This double purity is inseparable from the ultimate clear mind or Buddha's transcendental wisdom.

Question: Sometimes my mind is unclear. Is it ok to be stressed or get angry when this happens, or is that counter-productive?

Answer: Anger must be abandoned, even towards oneself. Because if one has anger towards oneself, then one is still generating anger that disturbs one's mind. So instead of getting angry, we should try to remove our stress through positive methods by cultivating a kind heart and clear mind. Through these methods, we should try to abandon anger, and we can also overcome our stress.

Question: Which meditation do you suggest to develop a clear mind?

Answer: In the *Abhidharmakośa (Treasury of Abhidharma)*, the great Indian master Vasubandhu said: “Upon a base of sound moral conduct: hear, contemplate, and thoroughly apply oneself to meditation.” By proceeding with the right intention and motivation, we can achieve a clear mind. To achieve a clear mind, we must first study. Based on pure moral conduct, we must study what we need to practice. Then we need to understand the meaning and how to practice. After knowing this, then we need to practice or meditate. By proceeding in this way, we can achieve a clear mind or wisdom.

Question: Is it possible to have infinite loving-kindness without a clear mind?

Answer: To practice loving-kindness, we need to have a clear mind. These two go together. But there are different types or levels of clear mind or wisdom. There is the wisdom possessed by noble bodhisattvas, and there is the wisdom possessed by ordinary bodhisattvas. When we practice infinite loving-kindness while we are on the ordinary path, then we need to have the ordinary level of clear mind or wisdom. At that stage, we would not have noble wisdom because we have not yet reached the level of a noble bodhisattva.

Question: A kind heart is related to bodhicitta, right? As to wisdom, is there any relationship or connection with emptiness?

Answer: Wisdom is the realization of emptiness or the true nature of phenomena. So, emptiness is the object of one's realization, and wisdom is the subject.

-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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