



Meditating in the City

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



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Acknowledgement

His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (the 41st Sakya Trizin) bestowed this teaching at the Jamyang Buddhist Centre, London, United Kingdom, in 1991. The Sakya Resource Guide—one of the first internet resources of Sakya teachings—shared a transcript online, and many other websites did as well. Years later, Tsechen Kunchab Ling published an edited transcript. Taking into account these prior noble works and a recording of the teaching, “The Sakya Tradition” edited and published this English booklet in 2020. The text was translated into the Chinese language by “The Sakya Tradition” translation team. We thank everyone who has contributed one way or another in making this teaching available, connecting many to the precious Dharma in order to obtain temporary and ultimate benefits.

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 Most Important Thing We Can Do Is Dharma Practice

We humans require many things and have many things to accomplish. Yet it is clear that no matter how much we possess or wherever we live, we feel that there is not enough. There are always more things to want, we are never satisfied, and we face dissatisfaction—whether or not we live in a developed country. Thus, in our own experience, we can see the truth of Lord Buddha’s teaching that saṃsāra’s entirety is nothing but suffering. The nature of saṃsāra is suffering, just like the nature of fire is hot—whether it is a big or small fire. So, what can we do? Everyone wishes to be free from suffering and wishes to have happiness. This is common to all—whether educated or not, whether a religious believer or not, and no matter what tradition one follows. For the sake of this happiness, everyone is making efforts in worldly, spiritual, or other ways. And every country is making efforts in its development to create more happiness and lessen suffering. But no matter what we do, there is no end to suffering and dissatisfaction and no real gain of the happiness we are seeking.

How then can we acquire it? Lord Buddha teaches that every sentient being possesses buddha nature. The true nature of our minds is pure. Right from the beginning, it is never stained with obscurations of any form. This is why, if we try and work hard, we can attain enlightenment. At the moment we do not see this buddha nature because it is completely covered with obscurations. But the obscurations are not within the nature of the mind. If they were, they could never be eliminated. For example, coal is by nature black; no matter how much you wash it, coal will never become white. On the other hand, a white cloth can have its whiteness obscured by dirt, but with right methods we can wash it and then see its actual color. Similarly, the obscurations in our minds are only at the outer level, and with the right methods they can be eliminated. Therefore, if we work hard following the Dharma path, we can become fully enlightened buddhas.

For these reasons, spiritual practice is most important. All other things such as material wealth or power are only beneficial within this lifespan. On the day we leave this world, we will have to leave everything behind—our wealth, our friends, even our precious body. Only consciousness will be left, and when this happens, all that we can rely upon will be our spiritual practice.

Even when we face major problems in this life, there is a vast difference between the person who has spiritual assistance

or ideas and the one who does not. When the person without any spiritual assistance faces such suffering, they are in a desperate situation and have to rely on wrong methods, perhaps taking extreme measures.

One of the basic teachings of the Buddha is that everything created by causes and conditions is impermanent. Additionally, any actions connected with defilements cause suffering. So, when we face problems or tragedies, it is clear that they are not just happening to us. Rather, impermanence and suffering are the nature of existence itself. Someone who understands this is more prepared to face problems. The problem itself, externally, might remain unchanged, but the suffering is reduced. A person who has spiritual assistance is better prepared to face a problem because he or she knows its true nature. This understanding lessens the mental burden, and when your mental burden is lessened, physical suffering diminishes. The mind is the boss and the body is like a servant. If the mind is happy, you could be in even the poorest conditions but still be happy. And if the mind is not happy, even if you have the best facilities, you will have a lot of misery. The mind is the most important factor. To give us strength to face the challenges of suffering even in this life, the most important thing we can do is Dharma practice.

All Happiness in This Universe Comes From Wanting Others to Be Happy

In this world, there are many religions. Each religion has its own beautiful aspects and ways to help eliminate suffering. But Lord Buddha, right from the beginning of his spiritual path, created bodhicitta or the enlightenment mind for the sake of all sentient beings without exception. Over the course of many lifetimes, he accumulated the vast heaps of merit and wisdom. Eventually, he attained full enlightenment, where he eliminated all obscurations and obtained every possible quality. Since his motivation was to benefit sentient beings, all his activities of body, voice, and mind were for their benefit. Of these activities, the most important was the voice activity—the turning of the wheel of Dharma. The Buddha taught us, in words, his great knowledge and realization—how to eliminate suffering and how to enter the path of liberation.

Just as space has no limit, there is no limit to beings. Limitless sentient beings are all different. Although we are human beings, each one of us has a different mind, different defilements, and so forth. In order to suit every level of our minds, the Buddha bestowed an enormous number of teachings.

One kind of teaching is not enough. Just as we require many medicines in order to cure the different types of disease, similarly in order to help limitless sentient beings, the Buddha gave many, many teachings.

Generally speaking, there are two different types of followers: followers who wish to follow the smaller goal, and followers who wish to follow the greater goal. That is why we have the two yānas or spiritual vehicles of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna.

Although the Hīnayāna path has many teachings, what in essence is most important is not to harm any sentient being. If you harm any sentient being, physically or mentally, it is not right.

The Mahāyāna path is not only to not harm beings but also to benefit them as much as one can because each and every sentient being is like oneself. From our own experience we can learn how much we wish to be free from suffering and wish to have happiness. From tiny insects to the most intelligent humans up to the deva realms, every sentient being has the same feeling: all wish to be free from suffering and to have happiness. It is not proper just to think of yourself, because you are just one person while others are countless. Between one and many, which is more important? The many is more important.

Besides that, upon selfish thoughts good qualities never arise; only sufferings arise. The great paṇḍita Śāntideva said, “All sufferings in this universe come from caring for oneself.”

If we think of ourselves, we have jealousy, pride, stinginess, desire, hatred, and so forth. All manner of impure thoughts arise, and any actions created with these impure thoughts create only suffering. Just as from a poisonous root anything that grows is poison, similarly any actions created from these defilements are only suffering. So, when we think of ourselves only, all that we achieve is more suffering.

Śāntideva also said, “All happiness in this universe comes from wanting others to be happy.” If we wish others to be happy, then all good things and all good qualities come, just as if a root is medicinal, anything that grows from it is medicine. Similarly, on the basis of loving-kindness and compassion, if we want to help other sentient beings, any actions that we perform will produce happiness. That is why the root of the Mahāyāna teachings is loving-kindness and compassion. Therefore, we must try in every way to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion.

However, merely having compassion is not enough. We must rescue sentient beings from suffering and put them on the path of happiness. But at the moment we ourselves are not free. We do not have full knowledge or full power. We are completely bound by our own karma and defilements. So how can we help? The sole most effective way to help sentient beings is to attain perfect enlightenment, because once we attain perfect enlightenment then we can rescue countless sentient beings even during a single moment. Even creating the enlightenment mind

for a single moment has immeasurable merit. It is most beneficial to have this wish to attain perfect enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

This perfect enlightenment does not arise without proper causes and conditions, and they come from following the Mahāyāna path. The first step is to have a very sincere wish to attain perfect enlightenment. Then you must practice. The main goal of practice is to develop both method and wisdom. In order to fly, you need two wings, and, similarly, in order to attain enlightenment, you need two supports: the method to realize wisdom, and wisdom itself. These two depend on each other. Method means the accumulation of merit through generosity, moral conduct, patience, zeal, and concentration. Loving-kindness and compassion will only suppress faults, the chief of which is self-clinging. The methods only suppress self-clinging. In order to completely dig out the root of self-clinging, we require wisdom that completely eliminates it. To develop wisdom that sees the ultimate truth of all phenomena, we must have concentration. With these two together, we will be able to attain perfect enlightenment.

Tame Our Wild Minds

Many people say it is very difficult to practice Dharma, particularly in big cities where there is so much distraction and noise, and everyone feels busy. However, the Lord Buddha gave many teachings to help us tame our wild minds. Because our minds have been so involved with defilements, we have been caught in the realm of existence and so we suffer. We have already suffered so much in the past, and we are still suffering. Furthermore, if we do not practice the Dharma now, we will continue to experience suffering ceaselessly. So therefore, the Buddha gave teachings involving many different forms of practice, but all of them serve to tame our minds.

The Sanskrit word dharma has many different meanings, but the word generally means to change: to change our impure or wild mind that is so involved with defilements toward the right path.

Although of course even just doing practice has some benefit, the point of practice is to change one's mind. If one's mind does not change, then one's practice is not very effective.

We must look to see whether the practices we are doing are making a real difference in our mind or not. If the practice changes our mind, then, if we use it in the right way, we could be the busiest person in the busiest city but still be a very good Dharma practitioner because everything we see and do, everyone we associate with, gives us a chance to practice Dharma.

For example, when traveling in cities and noticing many changes, we witness the truth of impermanence. When we see so much suffering, we are experiencing the Buddha's teaching that everything is suffering. The fact that we actually see it with our own naked eyes means we can immediately learn it. When we associate with the vast numbers of people in cities, we have a chance to help them, to practice compassion. When people disturb us or are angry with us, it gives us a chance to practice patience. In this way, if we can apply the teachings to our everyday life, then wherever we are, at work or at home, we can use our experiences and surroundings to practice the Dharma. These different experiences can help us to understand more deeply how important it is to practice the Dharma.

Use the Teachings in Our Daily Lives

Higher meditations like concentration and insight are very important, but in order to reach that level, it is necessary to cultivate the basic foundations such as contemplating the difficulty of obtaining the precious human birth, impermanence and death, the cause of karma, and the suffering of saṃsāra—the four common foundations. These you can learn from a teacher and read about in books.

However, just gaining knowledge is not enough. If we have held the relevant knowledge for a long time, but it has not worked a change within us, then we will remain the same person. We will have the same anger, and we will be unable to proceed in the Dharma. Although we might have heard about the difficulties of obtaining a precious human birth a hundred times, if it has not made a change in us, if we remain on the same level with the same defilements, then this means that we are not really practicing. Why is this so? Because we are not really experiencing it.

Thus, we see that knowing about the Dharma and experiencing it through contemplation are two very different things. You may know many teachings, but if you do not practice them, if you do not use them in your daily life, then this is not right. For example, the purpose of making delicious food is to eat it. If you make it but you do not eat it, there is no point. Similarly, knowing the Dharma only matters when we utilize it in our daily life. To do this, we have to use many different methods, including our daily experiences.

With these basic foundations, we can understand everything we see and experience not only as a teaching, but also we can develop the inner feeling or urge to practice Dharma. Then, we will not be wasting our time. We will definitely make every effort, just as prisoners constantly have only one thought: “When can I get out of this place?” When you have this real, sincere understanding of the suffering of saṃsāra and the other basic foundations, then you will have a real, inner urge to practice the Dharma. Then, through practicing the Dharma, your inner, higher meditations will generally arise.

First, having the basic foundations depends on our merit. Due to the accumulation of merit, practice of virtue, and prayers made in past lives, we have been born as human beings in this life, we have had the good fortune to hear the Dharma, and we have had a chance to practice it. Similarly, having a real,

inner feeling about spiritual practice depends on the merit that we have accumulated. So, we must accumulate merit through prayers, devotion to the guru and to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and through practicing loving-kindness and compassion toward all sentient beings. In this way, as our merit increases, our wisdom also increases, and these two grow together. When merit is fully built up, the wisdom will also come, and with merit and wisdom together you will be able to succeed on the path.

-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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