



The Samantabadhra Prayer: History and How to Practice

H.H. the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche



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By the merit of this work, may His Holiness the Sakya Trichen and His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin enjoy perfect health and a very long life, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.

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History of the Samantabhadra Prayer

As always, first and foremost, we need to develop the right motivation, which is very important. Then I will say a few words about the history of the Samantabhadra prayer^[1].

The Samantabhadra prayer was taught at the time when the great Buddha Shakyamuni was in Vaishali, one of the holy places in India. At that time, there was a young man called Norzang. First, he met Ārya Mañjuśrī, from whom he received teachings later on. After that, he received teachings from many great masters. He then met the great bodhisattva known as Kuntuzangpo (Tibetan: ལུན་ཏུ་བཟང་པོ་; Sanskrit: Samantabhadra). Kuntuzangpo, the noble bodhisattva, put his hand on Norzang's head. At that moment, Norzang saw many Samantabhadras filling space, as many as the atoms of a buddhafield. All these Samantabhadras placed their right hands on Norzang's head. In actuality, it is not easy to put so many hands on a tiny head, but this can happen when we have pure vision.

In the same voice and melody, all of these Samantabhadras recited the prayer known as Ārya-Bhadracaryā-Praṇidhāna-Rāja. Ārya means “noble”; it can refer to the great noble Samantabhadra. Bhadracaryā means “the good deeds of all the bodhisattvas.” Praṇidhāna means “aspiration prayer.” Rāja means “king.” For example, a universal king conquers many small kingdoms. Similarly, the Samantabhadra prayer includes many kinds of small prayers, which is why it is known as “The King of Prayers.”

While there are many, many prayers in the Samantabhadra prayer, before these prayers are recited there is the seven-limb^[2] prayer. “Seven-limb” refers to the limbs of prostration, offering, confession, rejoicing, requesting to turn the wheel of Dharma, requesting all the buddhas not to enter mahāparinirvāṇa, and dedication.

This seven-limb prayer is followed by many other prayers, such as the prayer of offering, the prayer of attaining buddhahood, the prayer of entering a buddhafield, and so on. There are also minor prayers such as praying to have good health and overcoming sickness, praying for our mind to turn toward the Dharma, praying to not depart from the enlightenment mind, and praying to have pure and perfect moral conduct.

The Samantabhadra prayer is called an aspiration prayer because it means one wishes to have all these goals and results.

One is not dedicating one's merit to have these, but one just wishes, saying “May we gain good health, happiness, buddhahood ...” There are many aspiration prayers. In short, it says that the space has no limit, similarly sentient beings have no limit. Unless and until all sentient beings are liberated from negative actions and afflictive emotions, one's aspiration is not exhausted. This prayer is endless and limitless.

After this, one dedicates the merit of the prayers. To dedicate means dedicating the merit to have temporary and ultimate results. If one does not know how to dedicate properly, then one can just think that one will dedicate in the same way that Ārya Mañjuśrī has dedicated before.

Notes:

[1] The complete title of the prayer is the King of Aspiration Prayers: Samantabhadra's Aspirations for Excellent Conduct (Tib. འཕགས་པ་བཟང་པོ་ལྷོད་པའི་སྨོན་ལམ་གྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ། pakpa zangpo chöpé monlam gyi gyalpo), comes from the Gaṇḍavyūha chapter of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra.

[2] Seven-limb (Tib. ཡན་ལག་བདུན་): the Tibetan word yanlag (ཡན་ལག་) connotes limb, branch, fold, element, appendage, division, part, point, and so on. The phrase yanlagbdun (ཡན་ལག་བདུན་) is commonly translated as “seven-limb,” “seven branches,” and “seven-fold.” According to His Holiness, it means there are seven parts or aspects in this prayer.

How to Practice

The Samantabhadra prayer is very important. Just by praying or reciting this prayer one will gain benefit in this life and next lives. In short, one can gain temporary and ultimate results, which means to attain buddhahood. If we act according to the prayer, then there is no need to mention that we can gain infinite merit and great benefits.

Although this prayer is very important, to act according to the prayer is more important than just reciting. We should first and foremost act according to the prayer—this is very, very important. The real benefit comes through our own practice.

For example, if one merely wishes to go to all the four holy places—Lumbinī, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar—one will not reach these holy places; one will not be able to arrive at these places to accumulate merit. Therefore, after having the wish, one must act according to the wish. One must prepare. One must embark on the journey to reach these holy places. If we actualize this wish by turning it into action, we can really go to these holy places to accumulate merit and purify our negative acts and obscurations. Therefore, just praying is not enough. In addition to praying,

we should act according to the meaning of these prayers. Then, definitely, one can achieve one's goals and fulfill one's wishes.

To put the meaning of the prayer into practice, one needs to have the thought of renunciation. And, based on that, one needs to practice loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta. These positive thoughts are especially important. With these positive thoughts one can accomplish the advice of one's guru; one can please the guru; one can make offerings to the guru through our own positive actions; one can truly make the world a peaceful place; one can unite the world; and one can generate happiness for oneself and all sentient beings. And through these actions, one can gain benefits in this life, in the next life, and in many future lives. Eventually, one can attain buddhahood. To accomplish all this, one needs to have positive thoughts.

Today I appeal to all of you to listen and know the meaning of these positive thoughts: loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta. Furthermore, after hearing and contemplating the teachings, one must practice or meditate. I appeal to all of you to do meditation or practice on these positive thoughts every day for at least five minutes. Although one might think one is too busy for this and that, this practice is really very important. Merely praying and knowing the teachings will not make a great impact on our mind, it will not change our attitude in a great way, it will not help to tame our mind. We need to subdue and tame our mind. To do this, we need to practice and meditate on loving-kindness, compassion, and

bodhicitta. By doing this, without any hesitation, we can definitely become a better person, and a spiritual and dharmic person.

These positive thoughts cannot be received as a gift from our guru or the buddhas. We cannot buy these positive thoughts from the market. To have such thoughts in our mental continuum, we really need to practice; without practicing, it is not possible to have such wonderful precious thoughts in our mind. This is especially important. So today my main appeal is for everyone to devote at least five minutes a day to practice these thoughts. It will definitely have a great impact on our minds. If one's mind becomes more positive, if one's mind is improving, if one's inner quality is improved, then definitely one can have positive physical and verbal actions. Through this, one can really have bhadracaryā, the good deeds of the bodhisattvas. Bodhisattva's actions or the bodhisattva's way of life is what we should aspire to have. Not only should we aspire to have it, but we should also attain it through our own effort. Through our effort, we can have the bodhisattva's way of life. This is very important.

In our lives, we may need many things, but the most important thing is to have good qualities. This is the source of real wealth and the precious jewel that we can have. Such inner quality and practice can help us not only in this life, but also in many lives to come.

Without the practice of loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta, no matter what we do, it will be difficult for us to achieve great goals. These positive thoughts are important and are

beneficial in the past, from beginningless time until this 21st century. These positive thoughts are the source of happiness and the real remedy that can control our negative thoughts, reduce our suffering, and help us eliminate negative thoughts and actions and their result, which is suffering. It will still be an important factor in the coming centuries. Therefore, positive thoughts are important all the time, whether we are in the past, present, or future. I can say with full confidence that these positive thoughts are the only way and method for us to achieve happiness. We can achieve happiness and good results through these practices. Based on these practices, we can achieve the goals. Based on these, we can accumulate the wisdom heap, and with method and wisdom together, we can achieve all of our dharmic goals without doubt and hesitation.

In this century, there are many smart people. In the coming century, there will be more smart and skilled people. Yet we still cannot find another solution to be free from suffering that is separated from loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta. In general, loving-kindness and compassion will always be important for everyone. On top of this, bodhicitta is also important for all Mahāyāna Buddhists. Some might be innovative and bring out new inventions; for example, now the world is talking about a flying car. Yet, despite the advances of technology that occur all the time, no one can find a replacement for loving-kindness and compassion. Loving-kindness and compassion are the most important factors to achieve happiness for oneself and others in all times, no matter which century we are in. As I said before, for Mahāyāna Buddhists,

in addition to practicing loving-kindness and compassion, we must practice bodhicitta, too.

Practice is especially important; if we just have an intellectual understanding of the Dharma teaching without practice, it will be very difficult for the knowledge to have a great impact on our mind and for us to improve ourselves. For example, if a chef puts a lot of effort into preparing food, but the food is not eaten, then the effort of prepping the food does not yield a good result. It is not enough just to make the food; without the food being consumed the goal is not accomplished. Similarly, knowing about the meaning of the teaching is important, yet after knowing the meaning, one must practice.

Through my own experience, I can clearly say, merely knowing how to explain loving-kindness and compassion does not make me a better person. I am still a beginner on the Buddhist path. I know a little bit about the teachings, I know a little bit about how to give teachings, but this does not make me a better person and a better spiritual person because I did not practice enough. Unless and until one practices, one will not become a good, genuine, and proper spiritual person. Therefore, I appeal to all of you once again that after knowing the meaning of the teaching, one must begin to practice.

With this, I will conclude my short teaching here. May the blessings of our root guru, Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha be with you now and always.

-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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