



Stūpas and Their Significance

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



"The Sakya Tradition" Publications

2021 © All Rights Reserved



This work is provided under the protection of a Creative Commons
CC—BYNC—ND (Attribution—Non—commercial—No—derivatives)
4.0 copyright. It may be copied or printed for fair
use, but only with full attributions, and not for commercial
advantage or personal compensation.

For full details, see the Creative Commons license.

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

Strictly Not for Sale, Free Distribution Only

Acknowledgement

His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (the 41st Sakya Trizin) bestowed this teaching in August 2013 at Sakya Tenphel Ling, Singapore. In 2021, this English transcript was prepared, edited, and published by The Sakya Tradition, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and making widely available the precious Dharma teachings of the glorious Sakya lineage. 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.

Stūpas and Their Significance

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

Published by “The Sakya Tradition”



Stūpas and Their Significance

Buddhadharma is the source of benefit and happiness. Buddhadharma is very vast and profound like an ocean. According to one's own ability, whatever amount one can take from it, even as little as a spoonful, will be of great benefit.

I have already explained to you that among all the vehicles of Dharma, the Vajrayāna are very advanced^[1], and that the Vajrayāna teachings in particular are given according to our own abilities. The majority of us are ordinary beings, and we have heavy negative karmas and a great fear of falling down into the lower realms. Therefore, the immediate and urgent requirement is to save all sentient beings from the sufferings of the lower realms.

Grand rituals such as the Mahāvairocana ritual^[2], and especially by creating a sand mandala in the ritual, can therefore accumulate great merit. These rituals are also a great way to save sentient beings from the sufferings in the lower realms, especially those who

have recently deceased. Therefore, we are fortunate to have been able to perform the great ritual here, especially during this month when, traditionally, purification ritual is performed for the deceased.

When Buddhadharma is brought into a country, one requires great blessings. When Buddhism first came to Tibet from India, there were a lot of obstacles, partly because it was the first time Buddhism was introduced to Tibet. Secondly, there were many powerful local deities who created a lot of hindrances, so it was very difficult to introduce and establish the Dharma. There is a saying, “Wherever there is deep Dharma, there is also deep māra.” There is also another proverb that says, “The precious Dharma is very rare, and at the same time has a lot of obstacles.”

It was very difficult to establish Buddhadharma when it first arrived in Tibet. For this reason, Guru Padmasaṃbhava, the manifestation of all the buddhas together, was invited to Tibet. Through his powerful blessings, all evil forces were subdued while good spirits and local deities were converted to Buddhism and became protectors of the Dharma. After that, Samyé Monastery and Dharma were firmly established. Since then innumerable monasteries have been set up and the monastic system has been established and expanded to these days.

One of the ways to clear obstacles and receive blessings is to build images of the buddhas, print holy books, and make stūpas. Images, books, and stūpas represent Buddha's body, speech, and enlightened mind, respectively. If one creates images, filling them with mantras is required.

It is said that there are four types of relics. The first type is dharmakāya relics. The mantras written on papers that are rolled and used to fill images of the buddhas, are an example of dharmakāya relics. The second type is body relics, such as hair, bones, and other body parts of the Buddha and holy masters. Another type is known as the hereditary relics. When great practitioners passed away, special visible relics from the body are left behind. Among the different colored relics, the round white ones, called *ringse*, are of a special kind.

The images are properly filled with mantras, according to special instructions. For example, the head of the image is filled with mantras of the lineage gurus, the middle part with mantras of the deities, the lower part with the mantras of the Dharma protectors, and the base is filled with mantras of the wealth deities.

The image is consecrated after it is properly filled and sealed. During the consecration, the wisdom aspect of the buddhas and deities is invoked and absorbed into the image; in actuality

we are inviting the living buddhas by performing this. In this way, one creates great merit. And due to this merit, the images pacify all kinds of obstacles and hindrances. One will be able to lead in great peace, harmony, and happiness. One will be able to practice Dharma very successfully and be able to accomplish great realization.

Creating images of the buddhas and deities have great benefit. But at the same time, if the process is not properly done, such as the fillings, and if the consecration, measurements, and so forth are not properly performed, this will cause great negative karma, too. If it is properly done, then it is great way to create merit and to receive the blessings.

Images represent the physical aspect of the Buddha. The voice that is represented by holy books—the teachings of the Buddha such as the Tripiṭaka, is even more important. Making and printing Dharma books properly without spelling errors and with full respect, and if they are printed and distributed not for the sake of making money or making wealth, but for the sake of good inspiration to the beings to gain the knowledge of Dharma—is even more meritorious. At present, we do not have the fortune to meet the Buddha, but through the holy books we can hear the teachings of the Buddha. The voice aspect is more important because it comes from the already enlightened mind—wisdom.

Therefore, building stūpas is even more meritorious because the stūpa represents the enlightened mind of the transcendental wisdom of the dharmakāya, the body of reality.

There are many different kinds of stūpas. But the standard one has eight different shapes. It is said that these eight different shapes were originally built in the eight holy places of the Buddha: Bodh Gaya, Varanasi, Kushinagar, Lumbinī, Śrāvastī, Sāṃkāśya, Rājagṛiha, and Vaiśālī. The eight different forms or shapes of the stūpas were erected at these four major and four minor holy places. The different shapes of the stūpas explain the different activities of the Buddha; for example, the great activity of Buddha descended from the god realm. When referring to “the descent of Buddha from the heavenly realm,” two different occasions might be signified: (1) when Buddha descended from Tuṣita Heaven to be conceived in the Kapilavastu Kingdom and (2) when Buddha ascended the Heaven of Thirty-Three after he attained enlightenment for the purification of his mother. In this context, the “descent” refers to the latter event. As Buddha lived quite some time in the Heaven of Thirty-Three teaching his mother and other god beings there, the beings in the human realm suffered and everyone in the human realm was longing to see the Buddha. In response, Buddha descended to the human realm again at the city of Sāṃkāśya, one of the four minor holy places.

There is a special stūpa form that represents “descending from the heavenly realm.” This stūpa has three ladders representing Buddha descending from the heavenly realm. It is said that the three ladders stretching down from the heavens into the city of Sāṃkāśya are made of precious jewels. The Buddha descended on the central ladder with Brahmā to his right and Indra to his left. Likewise, each of the other seven stūpa forms have symbolic meanings and shapes that represent the different activities of the Buddha.

One can sponsor a stūpa for the well-being of oneself and others, especially for the deceased. In fact, it is the most effective and excellent way to help the deceased—to purify their negative karma and to accumulate great merit so that they will be born in buddhaheld. Building or sponsoring a stūpa for the deceased that is filled with the four kinds of relics and that is properly sealed is much more meritorious than creating images or printing holy books. According to the Mahāvairocana Tantra, there are nine ways to purify the deceased’s negative karma, and one of them is to make stūpas dedicated for the deceased’s name.

It is also mentioned that when a person dies and after cremation, the ashes of bones will be blessed in a bone ritual. During the ritual, the long Mahāvairocana Dhāraṇī will be recited one hundred thousand times before the bones are pressed into fine powder to make tsa-tsa, a small stūpa made from mud. This is

followed by the tsa-tsa ritual in which the Mahāvairocana Dhāraṇī will be recited two hundred thousand times. Back in the olden days in Tibet, the ritual was performed either by a monk or an assembly of monks. If it is performed by an assembly of monks, depending on the number of monks, it can be completed within a short time. If the ritual is performed by a monk, it will require three months to complete, which is the same amount of time for performing a basic retreat of the Mahāvairocana.

After the ritual is properly completed, the tsa-tsa could be placed in a stūpa, even if the tsa-tsa is of an ordinary deceased person. Traditionally, however, it is not advisable to place the tsa-tsa containing ashes of an ordinary deceased being into a stūpa. Because people usually perform circumambulations and prostrations around stūpas and so on, if a stūpa contains tsa-tsa of ordinary deceased beings, then this would reduce the merit the ordinary deceased beings.

Typically, after a proper ritual is completed, the tsa-tsas will be brought with respect either to lakes or great rivers, especially holy rivers such as Ganges River or Yamuna River in India, and so forth. This can be performed in addition to placing the tsa-tsas into stūpas.

You could also sponsor stūpas to specially dedicate to the deceased,

and it is a great way to purify their karma and to accumulate merit. All the ancient Buddhist kingdoms and countries contained many stūpas. There are four wonderous shrines in our Sakya Monastery in Tibet: a Tara shrine, a Mañjuśrī shrine, a Mahākāla shrine, and a goddess Vijayā stūpa shrine. They are called wonderous shrines because there were special signs and omens observed when each of the shrines was built. The Sakyapas are considered the lineage holders of the four great translators: Bari Lotsāwa, Drokmi Lotsāwa, Mal Lotsāwa, and Lotsāwa Rinchen Sangpo.^[3] The teachings coming through the translators are considered very authentic because the original source of the Dharma is from India. Translators traveled all the way from Tibet to India to learn Dharma from the great Indian masters, and thus the lineage is considered very authentic.

One of these four translators is known as Bari Lotsāwa. Lotsāwa means “translator.” His personal name is Rinchen Dragpa. He is the spiritual master to the great Lama Sakyapa, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo. When Kunga Nyingpo was young, Bari Lotsāwa also acted as the throne holder; hence he is the second Sakya throne holder. When Bari Lotsāwa was building the stūpa of the goddess Vijayā, one of the four wonderous shrines in the Sakya Monastery, this stūpa was built according to one of the eight forms of stūpas in the eight great holy places that I mentioned earlier. During the consecration of this stūpa, yellow light illuminated the form until

light covered the whole area. At the same time, coming from the sky, the word “lekshö” was heard three times. “Lekshö” means “well done.” Yellow symbolizes the increasing activity^[4] while the goddess Vijayā is a longevity deity.

After the consecration of this stūpa, monks performed the goddess Vijayā ritual every day. If one circumambulates the stūpa, even those who are terminally ill can recover from the disease. There were stories of some terminally ill people who lived a long life after circumambulating the stūpa.

Another wondrous shrine of the Sakya Monastery is the Āryā Tara shrine. It is also associated with the same translator, Bari Lotsāwa. When Bari Lotsāwa made the Tara images for this shrine, it became known as the “triple saba^[5],” also known as the three levels of sattvas. There is one Tara image in the shrine made of metal; this is the physical aspect of the deity or samayasattva. There is another turquoise Tara statue inside the metal Tara statue—this is jñānasattva, the transcendental wisdom aspect of the deity. Then the emanation of Āryā Tara, who is actually in a female form absorbed into the image, is the meditative aspect of the deity or samādhisattva. Hence, the triple saba are samyasattva, jñānasattva, and samādhisattva, the three aspects of the deity.

The fourth shrine is the Mahākāla shrine. This Mahākāla image

originally came from Bodh Gaya, India along with the masters. It is said that when the first master came the image was just like a person who could talk to him. Eventually the image came into Lama Sakyapa's hands and ever since then remains as the main protector of the temple.



Overall, to bring and establish the Buddhadharma, to increase the happiness of all beings, to support the Dharma, and to be able to practice Dharma smoothly, it is very important to create images of the buddhas and deities, print Dharma books, and make stūpas. I am very happy to see that in this country there are many centers and many images of the buddhas, Dharma books, and stūpas. It is a great way to bring peace, happiness, and harmony to the country.

Notes:

[1] His Holiness the Sakya Trichen, *The Five Race Buddhas and the Five Emotions* (2021), published by *The Sakya Tradition*.

[2] His Holiness the Sakya Trichen, *Sarvavid Mahāvairocana Ritual: Saving Beings from all Bad Destinies* (2020), published by *The Sakya Tradition*.

[3] His Holiness the Sakya Trichen, *An Overview of the Sakya School of Tibetan Buddhism: History, Masters, and Teachings* (2021), published by *The Sakya Tradition*.

[4] The four activities of pacifying, increasing, magnetizing, and subjugating are presented in the Buddhist tantras as a classification for rituals, based on the goal of the ritual. These four activities are performed for the sake of all sentient beings.

[5] According to His Holiness, “saba” means “sempa” in Tibetan language, or “sattva” in Sanskrit language, which means “being” or “brave mind.”



■ 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.



**“萨迦传承”——把珍贵的萨迦教法
以您的母语精准圆满地传达于您**

**“The Sakya Tradition”—Delivering the
Precious Sakya Teachings Accurately
and Entirely in Your Native Languages**

www.sakyatradition.org

2021©All Rights Reserved

版权归“萨迦传承”拥有