



Introduction to Madhyamaka

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



"The Sakya Tradition" Publications

2022 © 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 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche bestowed this teaching by video on March 20, 2021, at the request of Singapore Sasana Society (Sakya Tenphel Ling). In 2022, 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 Their Holinesses the Sakya Trichen and Sakya Trizin enjoy perfect health and very long lives, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.

Introduction to Madhyamaka

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

Published by “The Sakya Tradition”

Introduction to Madhyamaka

Generally speaking, the great Lord Buddha was an ordinary human being like all of us. However, he developed bodhicitta countless eons ago through the assistance of Ārya Mañjuśrī.^[1] After that, he accumulated merit and wisdom for three countless eons, and finally attained the enlightened state—buddhahood. According to the Sanskrit tradition or the Mahāyāna tradition, in actuality, Lord Buddha attained buddhahood countless eons before he appeared in this world as Prince Siddhartha.

Nevertheless, Lord Buddha has examined all the methods and paths to approach buddhahood. In other words, the entire path to buddhahood that has been demonstrated by the Buddha was first examined, explored, and practiced by the Buddha himself. And it is through this path that the Buddha has achieved very positive experiences in attaining temporary and ultimate happiness. This is the path that Buddha has demonstrated to all sentient beings in

order to be liberated from suffering and dissatisfaction as well as to attain both temporary and ultimate happiness.

First, let us briefly review the history of how Buddha Śākyamuni attained perfect buddhahood. In the eyes of ordinary beings, before Buddha Śākyamuni attained buddhahood, he was born as Prince Siddhartha in Lumbinī to a royal family. As a youth he lived a privileged lifestyle and possessed luxurious items. When he grew up, he discovered that beings were suffering and thought, “There is a lack of essence and meaning in a luxurious lifestyle.” Therefore, he renounced his kingdom in search of a spiritual path.



In the pursuit of buddhahood, he meditated for six years in conditions of great hardship, but eventually realized that ascetic practice does not help in accomplishing inner or ultimate realization. Therefore, he changed his style of practice. He ceased the practice of asceticism. After accepting some food, he meditated under the Bodhi Tree where he tamed all the demons and finally attained the enlightened state.

Prince Siddhartha realized that living in luxury and living an ascetic lifestyle, without any food and drink, are both extremes. As mentioned previously, although Buddha Śākyamuni attained buddhahood countless eons before he descended to this world, in the eyes of ordinary beings he achieved enlightenment in Bodhi Gaya. After attaining buddhahood, all his conduct and teachings on conduct or view that he bestowed are free from the two extremes—the extreme of eternalism and the extreme of nihilism—all are Madhyamaka, the middle way.

In general, Madhyamaka refers not only to the view, but also to the conduct. After Buddha attained buddhahood, he did not turn the wheel of Dharma immediately. Buddha said that although he had found the profound nectar-like teachings, no one could understand them, so he would not give teachings. The great and powerful worldly gods, Brahmā and Indra, went to see the Buddha and requested him to turn the wheel of Dharma.

Meanwhile, Buddha saw that there were five fortunate disciples in Deer Park, Sārnāth, near Vārāṇasī, who were ready to receive the teachings. Given all these conditions, Buddha went to Deer Park to bestow the first teaching, which is commonly known as the first turning of the wheel of Dharma, to the five fortunate disciples. This occurred seven weeks after Buddha achieved enlightenment. In this first turning, he taught the *four noble truths*^[2].

All the teachings of the Buddha are free from the two extremes. It means that the teaching on the *four noble truths* is also free from the two extremes and is thus a Madhyamaka teaching, too. In this teaching, Buddha presented both the cause and effect of suffering as well as the cause and effect of ceasing the suffering. From a broader perspective, we can say that all the teachings and conducts of the Buddha are Madhyamaka because they are completely free from the two extremes.

The most profound Madhyamaka is the view that was taught by Lord Śākyamuni Buddha during the second turning of the wheel of Dharma in Rājagṛha, also known as Vulture Peak. At that time, he directly imparted the profound teaching on the view, emptiness, which was later recorded by his disciples in the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra. Like all his teachings, the teaching on emptiness is also a Madhyamaka teaching, but it is specifically on the profound Madhyamaka view.

Lord Buddha has bestowed innumerable precious and profound teachings to various kinds of followers. Due to the various followers' different ways of understanding and focus—for example, some focus on this teaching while others are inclined to other teachings—eventually four Buddhist schools were founded in India: the Vaibhāṣika School, Sautrāntika School, Cittamātra School (Mind-only School), and Madhyamaka School.

These four schools have their own way of explaining their understanding of the Madhyamaka view that are free from the two extremes. So, there are these four different schools. In reality, however, the Madhyamaka school disagrees with the explanations presented by the other three schools, claiming that the other three schools are not presenting the ultimate Madhyamaka.

The Madhyamaka school explains the ultimate Madhyamaka in three parts: the base, the path, and the result. According to the Madhyamaka school, the Madhyamaka of the base is the nonduality of the two truths, the relative and ultimate truths. The Madhyamaka of the path refers to the nonduality of merit and wisdom. The Madhyamaka of the result means the nonduality of the two kāyas, the Dharmakāya and Rūpakāya. Hence, all of these, the base, the path, and the result, are Madhyamaka.

The Madhyamaka School has its way to explain the Madhyamaka

of the paths of śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva or Mahāyāna. The bodhisattva path and the Mahāyāna path are of the same meaning. The Madhyamaka School explains that the paths of both śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha are free from two extremes, yet the Madhyamaka of bodhisattva or Mahāyāna path is the ultimate Madhyamaka. According to the Mahāyāna tradition, all of Buddha’s teachings can be combined into the two truths—the relative and ultimate truths—and there are no other teachings by the Buddha that are neither relative nor ultimate truth.

Madhyamaka can be categorized in two ways: the subject-matter Madhyamaka (Tib. བཟླ་བྱ་དོན་གྱི་དབྱ་མ།) and the word Madhyamaka (Tib. བཟླ་བྱའི་ཆེན་གྱི་དབྱ་མ།). The subject-matter Madhyamaka refers to the meaning of the Madhyamaka teachings, while the word Madhyamaka refers to the words used in describing the meaning of the Madhyamaka teachings. Further, the word “Madhyamaka” also has two meanings: the words of the Buddha, such as the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra, and the words of great masters, such as the Madhyamaka texts by Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, and Candrakīrti.

Earlier, we discussed that the general Madhyamaka comprises all the conducts and views of the Buddha. However, sometimes when we speak of Madhyamaka or the subject-matter Madhyamaka,

we are referring only to the view—the ultimate view that is free from all the extremes, a state that is beyond words, thoughts, and description. Therefore, Madhyamaka is very precious and profound. It is taught that without depending on Madhyamaka or the Middle Way, it is not possible to gain liberation from the whole saṃsāra. Just as birds require both wings to fly and cross the ocean. Likewise, when following the teachings of the Buddha, we as ordinary human beings require both wings—the view and conduct of the Madhyamaka—to cross the ocean of saṃsāra. Without Madhyamaka, we will not be able to gain liberation from the whole saṃsāra. Therefore, Madhyamaka is very important. As I emphasized before, all the teachings of the Buddha, whatever they are, point to the relative truth or ultimate truth. And both truths are Madhyamaka, free from the two extremes.

Generally speaking, whatever phenomena we see, feel, hear, or touch, are relative truth. All phenomena are not inherently existent because if they were truly existent, it would mean these entities are present independently, without depending on the causes and conditions, and they could never change their own nature and thus would be permanent. However, this is not the case—whatever we see, feel, hear, or touch, all the entities in this world and all phenomena are not permanent and independent—all depend on their own causes and conditions.

Now, how can we say that these phenomena in the relative truth are free from the two extremes? The answer is all these phenomena are present for us to see, feel... they appear to us as if they are a magical show or a dream. They exist and therefore they are free from the extreme of nihilism yet at the same time they are not truly existent—they are not inherently existent and thus not independent or permanent. Because of this, all phenomena are free from the extreme of eternalism, too. In short, all the phenomena of the relative truth are like a magical show—all are not completely empty (that is, subject to nihilism), yet all are not inherently existent (that is, subject to eternalism). In this way, we can say that all these phenomena, or the relative truth, are Madhyamaka, free from the extreme of eternalism and nihilism.

If I talk about the ultimate or absolute truth, there is nothing ultimately and there is no extreme at all. There are many logical reasons to establish the ultimate view. First, it is important to know that there are two types of “selflessness”: selflessness of phenomena (Tib. ཚུལ་གྱི་བདག་མེད་) and selflessness of persons (Tib. གང་ཟག་གི་བདག་མེད་). Those who do not realize the reality, however, grasp that there are two “selves.” In order to negate these two “selves” and recognize the two “selflessnesses,” we have to negate them through logical reasoning. First, to negate this true existent self of phenomena, we adopt logical reasons to negate the rising of the four extremes.



The Four Extremes

The first of the four extremes is self-rising, which means all entities are arising by themselves. We can say it is pointless to have crops as a resultant state if they are self-rising. In other words, if the “self” is the seed, and if the seed is arising by itself, then there will be nothing new to serve as its result, the crop, because the result is already there at the time when the cause arises. Hence, it is pointless of having self-rising. There is no difference between the cause and its result if the result is already present when the cause is arising. Further, in our worldly life, self-arising is not accepted if the crop (its result) is visible,

and its cause (the seed) is already gone. It is not convincing that a seed is produced by the same seed. Therefore, such an extreme of self-rising is negated through logical reasoning, using worldly examples.

The second extreme is rising from others. If the cause and its result are not the same—if its result is of a completely different identity from its cause, then it indicates that any result can be produced, regardless of its cause. If that were the case, a rice seed could produce other types of grains, other fruits, or vegetables. However, we understand that this is not possible at all. A rice seed will not yield a crop other than rice.

If the crop arises from others, but not from the same seed, then that would be a fault in producing many different types of crops that are dissimilar from their cause, and this is not the reality. As such, this arising from others is not accepted by us through such analysis because there is no rising from itself nor from others. And rising from both itself and others is the third extreme of rising, which is also a fault.

The fourth extreme of rising is the opposite of the third one, which means the result is neither arising from itself nor arising from others.

Through logical reasoning and analyses, we can establish that

all phenomena are of no truly existent rising. In fact, logical reasoning proves that there is no true existence of self or phenomena.

In regard to the second self, the selflessness of persons, seven logical reasonings are presented in the *Madhyamakāvatāra* by the great Candrakīrti to negate this self, using the example of a “chariot.” The explanation will not be discussed in detail here. Nevertheless, the seven reasonings negate the true existent self of a person.

These logical reasonings negate both the self of persons and the self of phenomena, and thus establish the ultimate view. When we negate both the self of persons and the self of phenomena, we will realize the two selflessness directly through our nonconceptual, profound wisdom. At that time, we will gain liberation from the entire saṃsāra and gradually attain buddhahood, the enlightened state, for the sake of all sentient beings.

I would also like to mention that the way of the Pāramitayāna followers in studying, contemplating, and meditating on the view is clearer, more elaborate, and more complete. Therefore, the Madhyamaka view presented in the Pāramitayāna or the Mahāyāna tradition is clearer, more elaborate, and more complete. “Clearer,” because the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra directly and clearly presents

that these five aggregates^[3] are devoid of true existence in detail, and hence are emptiness. The *Madhyamakāvatāra* text by Candrakīrti explained that there are twenty types of emptiness. And emptiness is one of these twenty types of emptiness, which is referred to as the emptiness of the emptiness. This indicates that if we think that the Madhyamaka view is just empty, then it is incorrect—because that means we are falling into the extreme of nihilism.

Emptiness itself in actuality does not have such a classification, but this classification is presented from the subjective point of view. The actual view is beyond all thoughts and words. We cannot think that this is empty when we cling to it as empty—such a view is not the right view. The ultimate view—the right Madhyamaka view—is free from all clinging or grasping thoughts.

Up to this point, we have discussed how the Pāramitayāna tradition provides a clearer and more elaborate presentation on emptiness. The Pāramitayāna tradition also provides a more complete presentation, too. The Pāramitayāna teachings not only negate the first extreme; in fact, this tradition negates all the four extremes completely. Thus, this becomes the complete emptiness view, the complete Madhyamaka view.

In brief, the Madhyamaka view is very important. Without the Madhyamaka view, no matter how much we practice, it is still not possible to gain liberation or buddhahood, the enlightened state. Therefore, what we require is the understanding of the *Parting from the Four Attachments* so that we can gain liberation and eventually attain the enlightened state.

The first three partings are on the conduct side, while the fourth parting is on the view side. Taken together, these four lines present the Madhyamaka conduct and view. And so, with both the Madhyamaka conduct and view, we will be able to gain liberation and eventually attain buddhahood, the enlightened state.

With this, I will now conclude my brief teaching on the Madhyamaka view. May all of you be able to understand, practice, and follow the Madhyamaka view and conduct in order to gain the temporary and ultimate realizations for the sake of all sentient beings.

Notes:

[1] According to His Holiness, Ārya Mañjuśrī helped many previous buddhas, including Buddha Śākyamuni, to develop bodhicitta and practice Dharma. *Follow-up interview with His Holiness in 2022.*

[2] *Dharmacakrapravartana Sūtra* records the first teaching given by Lord Buddha that is known as the *four noble truths*.

[3] Five aggregates or five skandhas: form, feeling, perception, mental formation, and consciousness. These are the basis for self-grasping.



■ 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.



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

www.sakyatradition.org

2022©All Rights Reserved