



A Teaching on Renunciation, Bodhicitta, and the Pure Land of Amitābha

His Holiness the 43rd Sakya Trizin, Gyana Vajra Rinpoche



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By the merit of this work, may Their Holinesses the Sakya Trichen, the 42nd, and the 43rd Sakya Trizins enjoy perfect health and very long lives, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.

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Introduction

Before we begin the teaching on Sukhāvātī, I think it is important to understand the origin of Sukhāvātī. Sukhāvātī is the pure land of Buddha Amitābha. Buddha Amitābha was a king before he became the enlightened one. During his time as a king, he met Buddha Nampar Nangdze (Tib. ལྷམ་པར་སྒྲུང་མཛད་; Skt. Vairocana) and asked about the pure lands, because there are many different pure lands. As Buddha Amitābha heard about all the different pure lands, he instantly made a strong aspiration, wishing to create a pure land with all the qualities of all the purelands, known as Sukhāvātī.

Buddha Amitābha is a very powerful buddha. As you may be aware, Guru Padmasaṃbhava, Tārā, and Avalokiteśvara are considered as emanations of Buddha Amitābha. Especially in Tibetan Buddhism, Guru Padmasaṃbhava, Tārā, and Avalokiteśvara are some of the most common practices for lay practitioners.

Unlike other pure lands, Sukhāvātī is unique because even ordinary beings are able to take birth there without having gained any realization.

The Four Qualities to be Reborn in Sukhāvātī

Understanding how we can be reborn in Sukhāvātī is vital. To be born in Sukhāvātī, there are four qualities or points that we need to think about.

First, we need to remember to create a strong wish to be born in Sukhāvātī. It means we have to constantly think about Sukhāvātī, imagining, “I wish to be born in Sukhāvātī,” “I wish I will go to Sukhāvātī.” From day to day, remember Sukhāvātī and its qualities, again and again.

Second, we have to accumulate merit. One of the best ways to accumulate merit is through the seven-limb practice.

The Seven-Limb Practice

The first limb is prostration. We do not just physically perform the prostration. It is very good if one prostrates physically in general. But here, we visualize that we are prostrating with our body, speech, and mind to Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha.

The second limb is offering. If one has a shrine at home or when one visits a temple or a stūpa, one cleans the shrine and makes offerings such as flowers, fruits, incense, and so forth. This is offering.

The third limb is confession. Confession is a very powerful method, if it is performed properly. It is not just any confession that we make, but *how* we confess. To properly confess, a buddha statue is placed in front of a bodhisattva or one's master. Understanding all the mistakes that one is confessing, even at the cost of one's life, one vows to not repeat these mistakes—this is the essential part of a powerful confession. There is no sin or negative deed that cannot be confessed or purified as long as all the requirements for confession are fulfilled. One has to understand the power of confession.

The fourth limb is rejoicing. Rejoicing means we feel joy for the works performed by buddhas and bodhisattvas, and also for the works performed by any ordinary being in serving others. When we see others are performing good deeds, we should rejoice, thinking *I am so happy for them.*

The fifth limb is praying and requesting all buddhas and bodhisattvas to remain in saṃsāra, not to enter nirvāṇa. We pray to all buddhas and bodhisattvas to remain here to continue

to teach and guide us, and to show us the path to liberation and enlightenment.

The sixth limb is to pray to buddhas and bodhisattvas to continue to turn the wheel of Dharma. We pray to them, requesting them to continue giving us teachings.

The seventh and last limb is to dedicate. We dedicate whatever merit we have to all sentient beings. If we do not dedicate our merit, it is just like a drop of water dripping on a dry ground that will be evaporated instantly. Yet, if we dedicate our merit, it is just like placing one tiny waterdrop in the ocean, it will remain in the ocean for a very long time. Hence, dedicating our merit will be a much more powerful practice. Dedication, in fact, is one of the best and most fruitful methods to accumulate merit.

The third quality is to have a bodhicitta mind. How can a bodhicitta mind be acquired?

To acquire a bodhicitta mind, first, one has to have a compassionate mind toward oneself, one's family, one's neighbors, everyone around us—basically all sentient beings. How do we generate compassion? It is through loving-kindness that we can generate compassion. How then can we generate loving-kindness?

Three Ways to Generate Loving-Kindness and Compassion

To generate loving-kindness, first, one recognizes that every sentient being, in one way or another, has been one's mother. Because we believe in reincarnation, therefore, all sentient beings, in one way or another, have been mother to each of us. We normally say that every sentient being has been one's mother because for most people, one's mother is the most precious, loving, and caring person. Nonetheless, we may also reflect that all sentient beings have been one's father or someone very close and dear to one. One is only able to recognize the amount of care and love one receives from these individuals in this life because of one's karma. If one thinks even more widely that every sentient being has in one lifetime or another been close to one or caring to one, one will be able to make the connection and eventually recognize that all sentient beings have been related to us.

Second, it is important to reflect and recognize the tremendous love and care that all sentient beings have given to us.

Third, acknowledge that every sentient being has been kind and good to us. Each and every sentient being is just as important as the people who are significant in helping and caring for me in this present life.

These are the three reasons to generate loving-kindness. Then, we apply these same reasons to generate compassion.

Having generated both loving-kindness and compassion, we wish that every sentient being will attain bodhicitta, the bodhi mind, wanting each and every one to attain buddhahood, and to be awakened from samsaric defilements.

The Three Types of Bodhicitta Mind

There are three types of bodhicitta mind: like a king, like a boatman, and like a shepherd.

Bodhicitta mind like a king. Like a king who usually leads his people, having a bodhicitta mind like a king refers to attaining buddhahood first, so that one would have the power to lead all sentient beings toward liberation and enlightenment.

Bodhicitta mind like a boatman. The mission of the boatman is to bring everyone on the boat, including himself or herself, across the river to the other shore.

Bodhicitta mind like a shepherd. A shepherd tends their sheep by trailing behind them. This is similar to this bodhisattvas' method: "Until all sentient beings are enlightened, I will remain not enlightened."

These are the three types of bodhicitta mind, and they are the same in terms of results.

All of our practices, such as our sādhana practices, ritual practice, and meditation, are methods for us to be awakened. The practices show us the path—the ultimate truth, the reality of truth, or the true nature of all phenomena. Sādhana, retreats, or meditation, are not done so that we can perform them well. Rather, all these practices are performed so that we can train our mind and purify our defilements—to be awakened from saṃsāra.

This is how the bodhicitta mind is generated. It is essential to generate bodhicitta because with bodhicitta, one can attain the perfect enlightenment. The bodhicitta mind is different from compassion and loving-kindness. Having a compassionate mind or loving-kindness alone, one is not able to attain perfect buddhahood. Simply put it, compassion means we want every sentient being to be free from suffering, while loving-kindness means we want everyone to be happy. However, the bodhicitta mind has a wider magnitude and is vast. We need to have a very big heart and be brave to have a bodhicitta mind. Bodhisattvas are therefore known as the bravest sentient beings because the work they are undertaking to serve all sentient beings is very

difficult. Bodhisattvas are there to guide all sentient beings on the path to liberation and enlightenment.

The fourth and the last quality is to pray for all sentient beings.

Prayers have two aspects. First, one begins to pray for the well-being and happiness of all sentient beings, wanting them to be free from suffering, to be liberated from saṃsāra, and to obtain enlightenment. Second, when we perform our Dharma practice for the sake of all sentient beings—that is an active prayer.

Conclusion

Overall, Sukhāvātī is a celestial place created by Buddha Amitābha for ordinary beings. Once born in Sukhāvātī, there are endless opportunities to practice Dharma with almost no obstacles to practice. Therefore, generally one will accomplish enlightenment in Sukhāvātī in due time.



We have to understand and realize that everything is our practice; everything is a method. Regardless of what practice we perform, each one is a method for us to be liberated and enlightened. Different methods are available because the goal for all these practices is to help us to be awakened. It is similar to prescribing medicine for a child. Giving the child medicine that tastes bitter may not be easy. To accomplish the goal of getting the child to take the medicine so that they will be cured from the disease, we may resort to adding some sugar to coat the medicine or make the medicine in cute animal designs, such as a bear or bunny. This will encourage the child to take the medicine so that they will recover from the disease.

In other words, the reason we have all these practices is that beings have different abilities and thus different practices are required to help achieve the goal—to be liberated and to be awakened. To counter the desire, for example, typically we practice impermanence. Once we realize that nothing lasts forever, our desire for material objects will reduce. To counter anger, one practices compassion. And likewise, for ignorance, one contemplates that everything is interdependent. We reflect that if “first” does not exist, naturally there will be no “second.” In other words, “second” is present because there is “first.” Likewise, “right” exists because there is “left.”

With the understanding that all practices are methods for us to be awakened from saṃsāra, we will be able to efficiently progress on the path and ultimately accomplishing our goal.



- His Holiness the 43rd Sakya Trizin, Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, is the second son of His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (the 41st Sakya Trizin). He belongs to the noble Khön family, whose successive generations have provided an unbroken lineage of outstanding Buddhist masters.

At an early age, Rinpoche undertook his training in the principal rituals and prayers of the Sakya lineage. Rinpoche has received from His Holiness the Sakya Trichen most of the major initiations, empowerments, oral transmissions, blessings, and pith instructions that are inherent to the Sakya lineage. Furthermore, Rinpoche has received numerous common and uncommon teachings from some of the pre-eminent teachers of Tibetan Buddhism of our age.



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