



The Nature of Mind

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



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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.



Although the teachings of the Buddha are
always emphasizing on loving-kindness
and compassion,

Practitioners who are striving to realize the
truth, do not cease just there.

Then,

What is the essence in accomplishing
enlightenment, the buddhahood?

How should we practice in order to attain
such state?

In the pursuit of seeking the truth, what
should we be mindful of?

Let's read *The Nature of Mind* by
His Holiness the Sakya Trichen,
and seek the truth together.



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Introduction

Now that we have achieved a human birth, we are free from all unfavorable conditions, have all the right conditions for the Dharma, and are fortunate enough to be born at the time when the Buddha has arrived in this universe. Moreover, his teachings are still living, and one can meet a spiritual teacher who can impart instructions to one.

The most important matter in one's life is to practice the Dharma, because only through Dharma practice will one be truly free from suffering in saṃsāra, and will one be able to gather real and everlasting happiness. In reality, every sentient being possesses buddha nature, because the true nature of our mind is pure right from the beginning. However, we do not realize this, and due to this we cling to a notion of a self and thus create the karma to be reborn continuously in saṃsāra. Based on one's dual vision or illusory vision, one generates more karma that keeps us continuously in this realm of existence.

What Is Buddha Nature

We have five aggregates: form, sensation, perception, mental activity, and consciousness. Of the five, the most important is the aggregate of consciousness. It has six parts: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The first five are the five senses. The sixth—the consciousness of mind—is the main consciousness, and although it is one mind consciousness, on different occasions it has three aspects.

When the mind is “facing outward and holding on to an object,” it is the mind or whatever that causes one to think.

When the mind “turns inwardly and clings to the object,” it is now known as the “defilement mind.”

The third aspect is when the mind is free from both “facing outward holding an object” and “facing inward and clinging to an object”—this mind is free from all phenomena and remains

in the nature of clarity since beginningless time until perfect enlightenment is accomplished.

Mind is the part that is caught in this realm of saṃsāra, which is full of suffering. Mind is also the one that commits either nonvirtuous deeds, virtuous deeds, or indifferent deeds. The base for the mind is clarity, known as “all-base consciousness,” which in actuality, is the complete combination of clarity and emptiness that are inseparable. When we talk about consciousness, it is from the clarity point of view, and when we talk about buddha nature, the tathāgatagarbha, it is from the emptiness point of view. However, in actuality, the two should be one combination. The nature of mind is, of course, emptiness, and this is the base for both saṃsāra as well as nirvāṇa. So, therefore, it is called all-base consciousness.

How does the all-base consciousness become saṃsāra?

Even though we possess this basic clear light nature of the mind, we do not realize this, and we are completely caught in the illusions that we cling to as a self. When we have a “self,” there are “others,” and when there are “others,” there are defilements such as desire for the protection of self and hatred for others. And when we have desire or hatred, it then creates actions—physical, verbal, and mental. Through actions, karma is created.

As soon as one creates karma, it is like planting a seed in fertile ground, the seed is planted in this all-base consciousness. So, if one plants the seed in the right soil with the right temperature, moisture and so forth, then in due course it will grow. Similarly, when one creates karma, the propensity or the seed is planted in this all-base consciousness, and in due course, the result of our karma will ripen. Whatever the result, be it good or bad, once it is ripened, one has to experience it. Therefore, this is how the all-base consciousness becomes the base for saṃsāra.

Now, however, on the basis of this, if one tries to find the true nature of the mind, if one tries to realize the ultimate truth by practicing the Dharma, starting from taking refuge onwards, and followed by the accumulations of both wisdom and method, this same base will become the cause for nirvāṇa. Therefore, the all-base consciousness, in actuality, is neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous—it is actually indifferent.

This is the basic discussion about buddha nature.

How to Realize the Nature of the Mind

In one of the most important teachings, Lord Buddha says:

One should not commit nonvirtuous deeds,

One should try to practice virtuous deeds,

One must tame the mind,

And this is the Buddha's teachings.

Most importantly, we must tame our wild and impure mind because it is the mind that is being caught in saṃsāra; it is the mind that is experiencing suffering or happiness by committing nonvirtuous deeds or performing virtuous deeds, respectively; it is the mind that is practicing on the path; and it is also the mind that is going to gain enlightenment. Therefore, taming the mind is the most important matter and the first step to determine the right method in doing so.

The mind is so used to defilements and ordinary thoughts, we must develop a pure and good mind. From the absolute point of view, we must make efforts to realize the primordial wisdom in order to gain buddhahood, the ultimate great bliss. To do so, one needs to realize the true nature of the mind.

If one realizes the true nature of the mind, then one will be able to know everything, and all the problems will disappear.

How can we realize the true nature of the mind? It is through two ways: one is through the accumulation of merit, and the other is through the blessing of the guru, which is also through merit accumulation.

Since the guru is the combination of all the buddhas, deities, Dharma, and Saṅgha—everything—the combination of all shrines. The best way to accumulate merit is through the guru yoga practice. Therefore, in order to realize our true nature of mind, it is very important to place a lot of emphasis on the guru yoga practice.

Until one has developed true inner devotion, one will not be able to see one's root guru as the real Buddha.

The root guru is the person who bestows empowerments and initiations upon one. However, most importantly, the root guru

is the teacher who can directly introduce or point out the true nature of the mind to one. When a guru who possesses great qualities and great power meets with a disciple who harbors great devotion, and then through the great method of the Vajrayāna teachings one will be able to realize the ultimate truth in a short period of time. It is therefore very important to first emphasize the practice of guru yoga.

One should receive teachings on directly pointing out the nature of mind, such as Dzogchen teachings, from one's guru with great devotion and meditate on it. It is not something that one can learn in a few hours or a few days. Rather, these teachings require one to master gradually.

Instead of pursuing deep teachings right away, it is very important to first practice the two bodhicittas: relative bodhicitta and absolute bodhicitta.

Relative bodhicitta is the wish to attain the ultimate enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. After generating the relative bodhicitta, one tries to develop the practice of devoting one's body, speech, and mind full-time for the sake of all sentient beings, taking all bad circumstances, sufferings, and defilements of others upon oneself, commonly known as *tonglen* mediation or "giving and taking" meditation. Through this exchange

meditation of the bodhisattva path, one will be able to conquer and suppress this self-clinging that we are so accustomed to since beginningless time—or, at least, the self-clinging will be reduced. Further, other practices such as the six perfections^[1] are also required for the same purpose.

Absolute bodhicitta is the realization that the ultimate nature of all phenomena is emptiness. To generate absolute bodhicitta, two practices are required: śamatha, or concentration meditation, and vipaśyanā, or insight meditation.

Through the śamatha method, one will be to be free from ordinary thoughts and one's mind will be able to remain calm, without the interference of many thoughts. After achieving this calmness, by meditating on the insight wisdom, one will tear the obscuration of the dual illusory vision so that the true naked face of the mind can be seen.

As a base to meditate on the insight wisdom or the absolute bodhicitta, one must practice the concentration meditation properly, the concentration that is free from distractions arises in one's body and mind. And to do this, first, one must give up attachment to worldly activities through study and contemplation of the teachings that attachment is the source of so many sufferings. As it is said in the sūtras, one must see that everything

has no purpose, no meaning, no essence, and thus is not worth being attached to because it brings only suffering. Moreover, the consequence of having other defilements, such as hatred, only brings suffering to oneself and others in this life and in the future. So, one should attempt to concentrate on the cause and effect, nature, and consequences of both nonvirtuous and virtuous deeds.

Notes:

[1] Six perfections: The perfections of generosity, moral discipline, patience, diligence with great joy, meditative concentration, and wisdom. His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, *Entering the Path of Enlightenment* (2021), published by The Sakya Tradition.

Śamatha Meditation

The Five Faults of Concentration Practice

To initiate the concentration practice, first, one stays in a quiet place where there is no distraction of attachment or hatred. To have an effective practice, it is important to realize or to know the five faults.

The first fault is laziness—the lack of motivation and interest to practice virtuous deeds. To counteract laziness, one remembers the consequences of not performing the concentration practice, the suffering of saṃsāra, the difficulties of obtaining the eighteen prerequisites^[2], and impermanence and death. Hence, one must avoid laziness and attempt to perform the concentration practice.

The second fault is forgetfulness. It is very important to remember the methods and techniques, and all the details of the teachings that one has received from one's guru.

The third fault is dullness and distraction; these are two aspects and are the main obstacles of concentration. Dullness refers to one's mind feeling sleepy-like or a sinking feeling. Distraction means the mind is scattered, distracted, or agitated so that the mind wanders and is caught by outer objects. One does not have any motivation to perform the concentration practice, but when one tries to practice, one's mind is either sinking or scattering.

The fourth fault is not applying the antidote. When one is performing the concentration practice and one knows that one's mind is either in dullness or agitation, one should immediately apply its antidote. If, however, one does not apply the antidote, then this becomes the fourth fault.

The fifth fault is over-application of the antidotes. When one's mind is dull or being agitated, one applies antidotes, yet in this context, the fault lies in placing too much emphasis on the antidote itself and thus is creating more disturbances to the mind.

These are the five faults of concentration that one must first know before pursuing the concentration practice.

There are eight antidotes in total: four of them are for the first fault while each of the remaining faults has one antidote.

The Four Antidotes for the First Fault

The first antidote is diligence. By remembering all the consequences of not concentrating, all the suffering of saṃsāra, and so forth, one should make efforts to bring one's mind to the point—the concentration.

The second antidote is faith: having faith in the teachings, the path, and the result. When one sees great results then one will naturally wish to make the efforts to perform the concentration practice.

The third antidote is desiring enlightenment. For one's own sake as well for the sake of all sentient beings, one could attain ultimate enlightenment, which possesses an unimaginable amount of infinite qualities. Therefore, it is very important to create the wish for enlightenment, and by strongly developing this wish one can avoid the faults and make efforts.

The fourth antidote is comfortably abiding: that is, to remain calm and in balance physically and mentally. Otherwise, one could not make enough efforts to bring one's mind to concentration.

These four points are the antidotes for laziness, the first fault.

The antidote for the second fault—forgetfulness—is remembering all the techniques and teachings on concentration and being mindful. Through mindfulness not only do we remember the techniques and teachings, but we are able to bring them to mind all the time. So, whenever we perform the concentration practice, we need not receive the instructions again. Rather, all the instructions are with us, and we will remember them and apply them in our practice anytime and all the time.

An antidote for the third fault, dullness and agitation, is watching. It is difficult for ordinary people, in particular beginners, to notice whether one's mind is either in dullness or in agitation. Therefore, one should always be watching one's own mind, to know whether the mind is in dullness or in agitation because one can then apply the appropriate antidote.

The seventh antidote, which corresponds with the fourth fault, is to apply the antidote. As soon as one is aware that one's mind is either in dullness or in agitation, one immediately makes an effort to apply its corresponding antidote. Otherwise, proper concentration and its quality will not arise. It is therefore very important to apply the relevant antidote as soon as one notices the condition of one's mind.

The eighth antidote—applying equanimity—is the antidote for over-application, the fifth fault. It is important to apply equanimity the moment one’s mind is disturbed. One will be able to fulfill whatever one needs if our physical body and mind are balanced. During the concentration practice, when one over-applies, instead of developing concentration, the mind creates more disturbances, and at this time it is important to apply equanimity immediately.

The above are the five faults and their corresponding eight antidotes.

The Nine Methods of Śamatha Meditation

When one does the concentration practice, it is important to first focus on a certain object such as an image of a buddha or a flower that are two feet away from one’s eyes.

The first method is known as placing the mind. First, one should stay in a quiet place. One’s body in a full meditative posture: one sits comfortably in a full lotus position; placing one’s hands down on one’s knees or thighs, with the upper arms parallel to the torso, or the left hand rests in one’s lap facing up while one’s right hand is placed lightly on top of it, with the thumbs gently touching each other; eyes should neither be open too wide nor too tightly close, but focused on the tip of one’s nose,

and one should not blink; one's body should not be bent forward or backward but kept upright and straight; shoulders rest evenly; head should not be tilted back, forward, or to either side; one's nose should be in line with the navel; rest one's teeth and lips in their natural state; one's tongue should touch the upper palate; inhalation and exhalation should be gentle, soft, and natural. Everything is balanced.

One's eyes, one's mind, and one's breathing are all concentrated on the object. One should not, however, think of the qualities of the object such as its shape or color, but just on its clarity. Place one's mind on the object and remain there.

The second method is continuously placing one's attention. When one is trying to perform the concentration practice, at the beginning, it is very difficult to maintain the practice for a long period of time. As such, one must practice in many short sessions, yet continuously—each session is short, and one takes break and rests in between.

The third method is conscientiously placing one's attention. When performing the concentration practice on an object, as soon as distraction arises, one should immediately try to recognize it. Instead of following the outer distraction, one immediately attempts to bring the focus back to the object.

The fourth method is placing the mind on the awareness of the danger of being distracted. This means that when one is distracted by an outer matter, one should remember all the bad consequences that are the source of all sufferings. So, therefore, one should not follow the outer distraction. Instead, through the awareness of the danger of distraction, again and again, one should remember its faults and attempt to bring back the focus onto the concentration object.

The fifth method is taming the mind. By remembering the qualities of the concentration meditation, one has great interest, great motivation, and a great wish to meditate. Through this, whenever one's mind is experiencing faults such as dullness or agitation, one should try to tame the mind.

The sixth method is pacification. Even when one performs the concentration practice on an object with proper techniques, we are so used to distraction and thoughts that our mind is easily disturbed, and dissatisfaction arises. Instead of using other methods to avoid these distractions, one should directly concentrate on the meditated object, and attempt to purify these distractions by continuously placing the mind on the object.

The seventh method is to enhance pacification. When one is practicing the concentration practice, if big opposing thoughts

and emotions such as anger and coveting arise, one should attempt to remove such thoughts and emotions through bringing one's mind back again to the object of concentration.

The eighth method is setting the mind one-pointedly. Sometimes one is doing concentration practices and experiences the fault of over-application—causing the mind to be disturbed and thus is not able to remain focused on the object of concentration. During that time, one attempts to remove such fault by bringing one's mind back to the object and abiding on it comfortably.

The ninth method is to effortlessly place one's mind on the meditation practice. By knowing the five faults and through the application of the eight antidotes and by adopting the nine methods, subsequently one is able to concentrate without effort, naturally and properly.

The main point is to recognize that dullness and agitation is the main opposition to concentration among the five faults. If one experiences dullness during concentration practice, one should avoid eating too much before the session. At the beginning of the session, one recites the refuge and lineage prayers loudly. During the session one sits higher and wears light clothing. One should always bring the body and mind to the point of full awakening throughout the entire session.

In contrast, if one experiences agitation during the practice, one should employ direct opposite counteracting methods, such as sitting on a lower seat, wearing thicker clothing, reciting the prayers quietly, and calmly bringing one's mind back to focus.

So, by employing all these methods, one is able to continuously practice concentration.

The Experience of Śamatha Meditation

The first experience that will arise is referred to as the mountain waterfall. In our everyday mind we have so many thoughts arising one after another, just like a mountain waterfall. However, we usually fail to notice these thoughts if we are not meditating. Yet when we sit down and attempt to meditate, the first experience that we have is to notice that there seems to be more thoughts arising than before we meditate. We may feel discouraged, but we should not be, because it is a good sign that now we are aware of these thoughts. This is known as the experience of recognizing thoughts, which is the first experience of concentration practice.

The second experience is known as a stream with rapids and pools. Once we gain the first experience—noticing that we have so many thoughts—we should not feel discouraged. Rather, we should continue with the concentration practice. Eventually we

will reach a point where, although thoughts still arise, there will be gaps that are without thoughts. Thought arises, and then goes away—leaving a gap that is known as the experience of thoughts resting—before it arises again. It is like a stream with rapids and pools. Water flows rapidly but remain for a few moments when forming a whirlpool and then moves rapidly again. Hence, this experience is known as a stream with rapids and pools.

The third experience is described as being like a pool in the river at the junction of the three streams. One continues with the concentration meditation despite having gained the second experience. Again, as one continues with the practice, one begins to see that thoughts arise, yet they go away completely for a longer period of time before they arise again. During this long gap when thoughts completely stop arising—which is also known as the experience of exhausted thought—one is able to see the clarity of one's mind. This experience is as though the water from three streams arrive at the pool, and when there is a heavy rain, the water flows rapidly; when there is no rain, the water flows slowly.

Once again, after gaining the third experience, one continues with the concentration practice and eventually will gain the fourth experience, known as the experience of an ocean with waves. It means one can remain in calmness without any thoughts

for an extended period of time, yet occasionally a thought of two arises, just like an ocean with waves. Oceans are usually calm but occasionally waves are formed. Hence, meditation is sometimes interrupted by waves of thoughts.

After this ocean-like experience, if one continues with the practice, all thought activity will cease in one's mind. At this time, one is able to remain single-pointedly in clarity, and this experience is the fifth experience—like an ocean without waves. An ocean without waves is in complete calmness. Similarly, one's thoughts have calmed down at this stage and one can remain in clarity of mind, which is like the light of a lamp.

When one is able to fully focus on the outer object without any thoughts, one can then turn one's mind inwardly and focus on the clarity of consciousness. One can employ methods to remove dullness and agitation and attempt to remain in the clarity of mind. It is essential to practice continuously.

Notes:

[1] The eighteen prerequisites include being free from the eight unfavorable conditions and endowed with the ten right conditions for practicing the Dharma. The eight unfavorable conditions are being born in the hell realm, hungry ghost realm, animal realm, god realm, and uncivilized lands, being born with incomplete faculties, with wrong views, and being born when a buddha has not come. The ten right conditions for practicing the Dharma are born as a human being,

born in a centrally located place, born with sense organs, harbor real faith in Dharma, has not committed extreme actions, born when a buddha has appeared, born during the time when buddha is giving teachings, born when a buddha's teachings are still a living tradition, born where there are followers of the living tradition, and born with the opportunity to find the right livelihood for Dharma. His Holiness the Sakya Trichen, *Opening the Door to Dharma Part II of II: The Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind toward Dharma (2020)*, published by The Sakya Tradition.

Vipaśyanā Meditation

Once one can concentrate properly and fully, which means one's mind is able to remain single-pointedly, on this basis, one can now proceed to perform the insight wisdom meditation. This insight wisdom is the essence of all the Buddha's teachings. All the other methods taught by the Buddha are for the sake of attaining this wisdom. Unless and until we realize this wisdom, we will not be completely free from saṃsāra. One is not able to cut the root of saṃsāra without this wisdom. Methods such as relative bodhicitta development and self-exchanging meditation will not completely remove the root of self-clinging; they merely suppress the self-clinging but do not completely remove the root of saṃsāra entirely, because they are not the direct opposite of self-clinging. Instead, insight wisdom is the direct opposite of self-clinging. Therefore, on the basis of the clarity of concentration, one should meditate on absolute bodhicitta.

To explain absolute bodhicitta, we first have to recognize the

clarity of mind. This means that all manifestations of outer and inner existence are actually arising from one's own illusory mind—there is no such thing as outside vision. All appearances are in fact from one's own mind. All outer appearances are devoid of self-nature.

One might question that, since we do have experiences and feelings, therefore don't these things exist?

We can see, hear, and also have different experiences like happiness and suffering. We think that there is an "I," the "I" who is suffering, the "I" who is practicing, and so forth. But when we carefully examine these ideas, there is no basis for "I" or for the "self," because if there is a basis, if there is a real self, it has to be either a name, the body, or the mind. The "name" is, of course, empty. It is only a given "name"; it has no real essence. It could be any given "name." Anyone can be called by any name because it is only what the person is called; there is no such thing as the "name" that exists on its own.

The same applies in the case of our body. When we carefully examine our body, there is no such thing as a "self." One cannot find a "self" in any of the parts of the body, such as teeth, bones, hair, skin, blood, flesh, and so on.

There is also no “self” in the mind, which has three parts: the past, present, and future. The past is already gone so the past is not the self; the future is yet to arise and therefore the future is also not the self; the present is changing—it is not something that changes after one hour or even one minute—it is changing even in every moment, the shortest possible length of time. The mind is changing every moment, and even the shortest moment can be divided into three parts. So, therefore, since everything is changing moment by moment, nothing can really be considered as a self.

Back to the question in regard to why we have feelings and emotions: How can we experience feelings such as worries if there is no self? This is due to our own heavy karma and the propensities.

Imagine that one heads to a dark place and is frightened by a snake. Later at a different place, the moment one sees a rope lying on the ground, one instantly mistakes the rope for a snake and feels the same shock and fear.

Similarly, we are so used to self-clinging that we think there is an existence of a self. As a result, this self-clinging creates all of our suffering. Not only there is no individual self, but all entities are in fact devoid of self-nature, too. In the same way, because of the

object and the subject being dependent on each other; if there is a mind as a subject and an entity as an object, both subject and object depend on each other. If there is no mind or self that is the subject, there is no object, too. In another example, if there is no right, then naturally there is no left. Yet if “right” exists, of course there is bound to be a “left.”

All phenomena are actually the manifestation of our own mind. There is no such thing as an external object. It is stated very clearly in many sūtras and can also be known from our own experience and logical reasoning, that if outer objects exist, then the outer appearances of all the outer objects should appear the same to every being. Yet in fact, this is not the case. For some people certain places create happiness, yet the same place creates unhappiness for others. Some people can see an object while some cannot.

For example, in the case of a glass of water, beings from all six realms see the same glass of water as six different things: hell beings see water as a burning, molten iron; hungry ghosts see it as inedible sand; animals see the glass of water in various forms—fish, for example, see it as a living place, their home; human beings see it as a glass of water; demi-gods see it as a weapon; and god beings see it as nectar. The same object appears to beings

of different realms very differently—this proves that all outer objects, in reality, do not exist—they are like dreams.

External objects and inner mind are dependent on each other. So when external objects are nonexistence, the inner mind is also nonexistence. The past mind is already gone while the future mind is yet to arise. Something that is not arisen and is yet to be born is not real. When we carefully examine the present mind, we cannot see any color or shape. The mind is neither inside the body nor outside the body. As it is said in the sūtras, “The mind is not in any color or shape, and is not seen by anyone, because its true nature is completely beyond our present way of illusion.”



There is a vast difference between a person who is dreaming and a person who has awakened from a dream. The person who is dreaming is either feeling anxious or is attached to the object that he or she is seeing. In contrast, the person who has awakened does not feel anxious or attached to all phenomena and does not give rise to any thoughts. Similarly, all these objects and phenomena that we are seeing and clinging to appear as a dream to all buddhas and bodhisattvas who have realized the ultimate truth. Therefore, we must try to realize the true nature of the mind, which is completely free from all of our ordinary ways of seeing, reviewing, or expressing inwardly, and are away from all the extremes such as “existing,” “nonexisting,” “either existing or nonexisting,” and “neither existing nor nonexisting.”

Conclusion

Through concentration and insight wisdom, one should try to look into the true face of the mind, in a way that is free from the curtains of the dual vision—the subject and object. When one realizes this ultimate truth, then one is completely free from all forms of suffering. Through the practice of the Vajrayāna path, all of us will be able to attain the ultimate Buddha Vajradhara state for the sake of all sentient beings.

With this, I am concluding my talk here. By giving this teaching as well as listening to this teaching, great merit is earned, and we shall dedicate this to all sentient beings.



■ 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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