



The Proper Way to Do Our Daily Sādhana Practice

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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After receiving the teachings and empowerments, are you required to do the sādhana practices daily?

Do you feel passionate at the beginning when doing your sādhana practice, yet feel burdened to maintain the practice daily?

What should we do to receive blessings from our teachers through the sādhana practices?

In this teaching, using sādhana practice as an example, His Holiness the 43rd Sakya Trizin provided advice on issues that we may encounter on the Dharma path. Let us study and contemplate on this teaching, and make any necessary changes to our practice.



The Proper Way to Do Our Daily Sādhana Practice

When practicing Mahākāla—as when practicing any deity—we practice for the benefit of all sentient beings. From time to time, it is important to check where your practice is heading, given that we do our sādhana practice every day, and that your daily practice does not become “ordinary”—although we are “practicing,” we do not know what and why are we practicing.

Of all the practices, the sādhana of your deity is one of the most significant practices. That is where all the blessings and teachings are gathered. If you fail to do the sādhana practice, the power and meaning of doing all the other practices, such as rituals become less. Receiving initiation is just the beginning—it is never the end of our practice path. It is, of course, also a blessing because we receive it from great masters.

It is very important for us to do the deity sādhana. From time to time, it is important to remember the reason we received the

initiation. We all want to receive blessings and initiations, such as long-life initiation, yet sometimes we have forgotten the reason why we did so. Reflecting on the reason why we received this initiation is also beneficial for our daily life, because our practice is not only beneficial for ourselves but also to others.

We need to remember that despite our guru telling us that we are practicing for the sake of all sentient beings, in actuality, we ourselves gain the most benefit. The greater the number of sentient beings you are doing your practice for, the greater will be the blessing that you receive, and thus the merit accumulated will be greater. The more merit gained, the closer you are to buddhahood. Without the accumulation of merit, buddhahood cannot be attained.

Based on my understanding of the teachings of the Buddha and other masters—whether they are about emptiness, compassion, or other topics—the essence of all these teachings is for us to control our emotions, our ego. When the teachings state that all phenomena do not exist, it also means that “you” do not exist. If “you do not exist,” it also means that “I,” do not exist. Likewise, when there is “right,” there is “left.” This is interdependence.

When Buddha talked about emptiness, it was made clear that if everything you see outside yourself does not exist, that means you also do not exist. Yet, if we are told that we do not exist, we

will immediately question, “What do you mean that I do not exist? I am right here. Of course, I exist!” So, it is difficult for us to understand and accept this notion.

If, however, we prove that this building, this shrine, that object, or even that person does not exist, gradually and eventually we will be able to understand. In fact, the Buddha’s focus was to teach us that we do not exist inherently. He attempted to explain to us that if the external phenomena do not exist or are empty in nature, naturally and logically “we” also do not truly exist. In this way, he explained about emptiness. Interestingly, he skillfully leads us to realize that we do not exist, rather than telling us so directly. Having realized that external phenomena do not exist inherently, we come to realize that we are empty in nature as well, and so are our ego and all our negative emotions.

In the same manner, the Buddha gave teachings on compassion. If we observe closely, we will find that when we feel compassionate toward someone, it is impossible for us to give rise to defilements such as anger to that person. This is because compassion and defilements do not go hand in hand. We will find ourselves feeling very humble and small when we have compassion toward another being. Compassion makes you feel humble and insignificant. This is another method that helps us control our negative emotions.

When we mention “all sentient beings,” we refer to limitless sentient beings, not merely human beings. When we attend a football match or a musical show, when we are in a large crowd, we feel that we are so small; we do not feel we are all that great.

A few years ago, I was invited to Kenya to see the Great Migration, in which all the animals travel from one place to another to look for water. In the safari there are a large number of different kinds of animals, whereas there are only a few humans witnessing them. When you are in such environment, it makes you feel rather insignificant and small.

We all want happiness, and if we can control our negative emotions, we will be happy. In general, we think we are unhappy—we are suffering—because of our own mind and expectations set for others. Be they our parents, spouse, children, relatives, friends ..., all of us have egos—we want to have a say; we want to achieve our wishes and plans, we want to make goals and achieve our own plans. When things go against our wishes, when others disagree with us, we are upset, and thus we suffer.

If we have not set any expectation right at the beginning, whatever the outcome may be, it will be fine with us. For example, when we go out for a dinner with our immediate

family, one family member wants Chinese food while another may prefer Italian food. Both are trying hard to convince the entire family that their suggestion is better than the others, using all kinds of reasons, such as the taste of the food, the ambiance of the restaurant, and so forth.

If others disagree with us, one gets upset and disappointed, and this is suffering. We have to examine why we have such feelings. Most of the time we will realize that if we can lower our expectations, then whatever happens will not become a problem for us, and thus we will not experience much suffering.

Since we were children, we have always been desiring something, be it sweets or toys; as adults, we long for more, such as more money, nicer clothes, bigger cars ..., we are constantly chasing something that we lack. There is no one in this world who does not want anything. Poor people think rich people have everything. Rich people think the richer ones have everything. Richer people think the richest have everything ... our desire is insatiable. We all know this. What is in fact important is how we think—why are we suffering? If we give it some thought, we can identify the cause of our suffering and be more in the present moment. Then, we can be more relaxed and happier.

However, we are never in the present moment—we are always

thinking about the future. We are often thinking about what we are going to eat tomorrow, and making plans for the day after, months or even years down the road. Young students are thinking about which colleges or universities they will be attending; college students are pondering about the jobs they will be offered; those who are working are always planning for future projects and assignments. We are always planning for the future but neglecting to be in the present moment.

This is why reflecting on death is important, especially for a Buddhist, because it gives us a chance to focus on the present rather than on an unpredictable future. Contemplation on death provides us an opportunity to think about our present situation, allowing us to anchor ourselves in the present. When death occurs, and it will, there will be no more tomorrow. One will not make plans after one has died. Rather, constantly remembering about the certainty of death will bring us back to the present—focusing on what we are doing now—we will therefore be calmer and more relaxed, regardless of what is happening at present.

Likewise, contemplation on suffering is very important for a Buddhist as well. Out of the six realms of saṃsāra, the human realm is considered the most favorable because human beings have an opportunity to deal with suffering. One has the luxury of experiencing suffering, for example, when one is sick. While

receiving medical treatment one will think about making positive changes in lifestyle, such as having a healthier diet, exercising more regularly, and so on. The same as when contemplating death, contemplating on suffering will make us focus on the present moment.

The present moment is where we should be at this very moment. Yet, most of the time we dwell on the past or the future. Contemplating emptiness and compassion will also help us to anchor ourselves to the present moment. If death occurs tomorrow, one will not make plans for the day after. If there is no road beyond this point, one will not plan to go beyond this point. Rather, one would just focus on the present.

Once we think about the present, for example, today's Mahākāla initiation, or other practices such as a Tara puja or the sādhanā practices of Avalokiteśvara or Mañjuśrī, will all come into play. Through the blessings of the deities, we can do these practices—this is the goal. The goal is not to receive the initiation, but to do the meditation practices after having received it. Even meditation practices are to help us focus on the present and thus to have a calmer mind. This is when the guru may be able to guide us.

When we claim that we are doing Dharma practices, such as compassionate or emptiness practices, yet we are thinking, about worldly matters and dwelling in the past and the future

and not being at the present moment, then these are not Dharma practices and will not benefit us.

I notice that people tend to ask their gurus many questions concerning their samsaric life or worldly matters, but not about their Dharma practices. The gurus are always thinking about us, showing us the path of compassion and emptiness, guiding us to study, contemplate, and practice for the enlightenment of all sentient beings.

Although we claim we are learning and practicing, most of us are focusing on worldly matters and future. When we fail to recognize what is our practice, we may get lost in our devotion. There is also a possibility that devotion is polluted by ignorance, anger, and desire. Therefore, we still have to check our devotion. We cannot claim that just because we have devotion, we can do whatever we want. This is one subject we have to ponder.

The best offering to our guru is our Dharma practice. There is no other, better offering that you can give your guru other than your practice. So, our daily practice is essential. This is how we gain merit. Daily practices mean practices that we do every day. I am not saying we have to do hours and hours of practices each day or meditate in a cave. Even if we do our practices for just a few minutes, this will be beneficial to us and our gurus. Our gurus manifest in this world because we need them, not

because they need us. We have to establish in our mind that the gurus born to this world, imparting teachings to us, and passing into nirvāṇa are to teach and demonstrate the path to us.

The only thing I am requesting of you is to do your daily practice, even if you can recite a mantra only once a day. You need to do so with a pure heart, be in the present moment, and think about all sentient beings. As mentioned earlier, when we think about all sentient beings, we become humble, less egocentric, and all our negative emotions will eventually go away. Even if one can allocate only a short time to daily practice, as long as we practice every day, we will notice a transformative change. We do not become skilled in any field without experience, and we do not become experienced overnight. It requires time to refine our skills, whether as an athlete, a chef, or in any profession.

When we have no physical pain or no distraction, we practice compassion. However, when we are in pain, and it will happen, or when someone screams, scolds, or badmouths us, and that also no doubt is going to happen, if our mind is accustomed to contemplating with compassion, it will be easier for us to think about compassion during that time, and thus not be overpowered by any negative emotions. The moment we hear criticism or nasty words about us, we can easily block them, and our anger is suppressed or does not even arise.

As mentioned earlier, our practice tends to become ordinary. To give an example, every one of us knows that anger, desire, and other negative thoughts are not beneficial to us. Yet, how many of us become angry over petty and trivial matters each day? If we notice we are feeling anger or desire, this indicates that we have not really been practicing properly. If our practice is done properly, it will be effective in controlling our emotions. We may be doing the practice properly with pure motivation, proper visualization, and dedication on the first day. But as time passes by, we may lose interest, become mindless, or take our daily practice for granted, racing through the sādhanā. Instead of thinking about the words of the sādhanā carefully and with proper visualization, we rush to complete the sādhanā practice.

From time to time, I do find myself in such situation. I am not saying that what I am feeling is what every one of you is feeling or will be feeling. Based on my understanding of the teachings and the advice given by my gurus, I am merely sharing my understanding and conclusion here. And I hope this will help you.



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His Holiness the 43rd Sakya Trizin



- 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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