



Wisdom and Compassion

His Holiness the Sakya Trichen



"The Sakya Tradition" Publications

Published by “The Sakya Tradition”

www.sakyatradition.org

E-mail: info@sakyatradition.org

Wechat ID: sakyatradition

Weibo: sakyatradition

IG: the_sakya_tradition

Facebook: TheSakya

Youtube: @TheSakyaTradition

Twitter: Sakya_Tradition

Strictly Not for Sale. Free Distribution Only



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.

Acknowledgement

His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (the 41st Sakya Trizin) bestowed this teaching in 2003 at Ahimsa Institute, South Egremont, Massachusetts, USA. In 2023, 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.

This publication was made possible by the generous donations of Maria Julia Silva, Lee Chee Kong, and Cheah Poh Kwai. We also want to thank all volunteers for their dedication and effort in putting this teaching together.

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.



Wisdom & Compassion

Wisdom and compassion are the essence to gain success in both worldly affairs and spiritual path. Why are these two qualities of the utmost importance?

Is it even possible to accomplish these great qualities? How did the Buddha teach and guide us in achieving these? What is the right way? How can one view both personal problems and world affairs in the perspective of Buddhism?

This text presents the teachings of the Buddha in a gradual and systematic manner. It is like a beacon of light illuminating and guiding us in the mist to reach our destination smoothly.

CONTENT

Introduction	1
The Need for Spiritual Development	3
The Buddhist Point of View	5
Questions and Answers	24

Introduction

Interviewer: Your Holiness, I'd like to thank you for allowing us to talk with you. I know that your time is very precious. The question I'd like to ask you is this: if you had a message to give to our television viewers today, what would that be?

His Holiness: I want to say I think it is possible for us to change our minds in positive ways, to develop qualities such as compassion, loving-kindness, tolerance, and forgiveness. As important and basic as these qualities are, we must cultivate them by training our minds along these patterns. Doing this will certainly be of great benefit for oneself, and it will benefit other beings, too. If we do this, then we can make the world more peaceful and harmonious.

Interviewer: That would be wonderful. I have many friends in the peace movement, activists who are against the war in Iraq. Some of them feel discouraged about what is happening in the world, but especially with the Iraq War because it has caused

so many deaths on both sides. Do you have any thoughts or encouragements for those people?

His Holiness: I think that we cannot conquer anger by anger. Anger can only be conquered by loving-kindness and compassion. As individual human beings, loving-kindness and compassion are the greatest qualities of our minds. We must generate these qualities and try to practice them. Only then can we conquer negative emotions.

Interviewer: Thank you very much. I appreciate your thoughts.

His Holiness: Yes, thank you very much.

The Need for Spiritual Development

Iwould like to take this opportunity to extend my warm greetings to all of you and to welcome you to this talk. I would also like to thank the various groups and families who invited me and arranged this opportunity to meet you and to share the teachings of the Buddha with you. Before I begin the actual teaching, I would like to recite a short prayer to the Buddha and all the bodhisattvas. [Recitation of prayer.]

In the world in which we live, there are many races, religions, cultures, and philosophies. Despite this diversity, there is something that everyone has in common: Everybody in the world wishes to be free from suffering and to find happiness. To achieve this aim, everyone is making efforts in different ways.

All technological progress has occurred for the sake of achieving human happiness. In the last century, especially here in the West, there have been many advances in science and

technology, and this material development has been beneficial in many ways, bringing us medical science, transportation, communications technology, and so on. At the same time, we can see clearly that, by itself, this outer material development is not enough. To find peace and happiness, we must make inner spiritual progress. It is only through inner spiritual development that we can find real peace and happiness.

Spiritual development is even more important today when we have modern technology. This is because technology is very dangerous when it falls into the hands of the wrong people, such as those with strong negative emotions. We need to control scientific and material development so that it will not fall into the wrong hands. It is clear that to use technology in a positive way, inner spiritual development is essential. I believe that if outer material progress and inner spiritual progress can be combined, this will be of great benefit and will make the world a happier and more peaceful place.

The Buddhist Point of View

By spiritual development, I mean all the major religions of the world. All the world religions emphasize loving-kindness, compassion, tolerance, patience, forgiveness, and so on. I myself am a Buddhist, and from that point of view, my task is to try to present to you the Lord Buddha, the one who gave the Buddhist teachings.

When the Lord Buddha first took the vow to attain enlightenment, it was for the purpose of benefitting all sentient beings without any discrimination or exception. The Buddhist term for the wish to achieve enlightenment for the purpose of benefitting all beings so that everybody will be free from suffering and will have happiness is called the *enlightenment thought*.^[1]

Once the Lord Buddha developed this thought, he accumulated merit and wisdom for a very long time—many eons. Through the combination of merit and wisdom, he was eventually able to eliminate all forms of obscurations.^[2] This means that all

forms of obscurations were completely cleared, that they will never occur again. They have been removed entirely from the root. Finally, the Lord Buddha attained enlightenment, meaning freedom from all obscurations and the attainment of every possible good quality.

After he attained enlightenment, all of the Buddha's activities—whether physical, verbal, or mental—were for the sake of benefiting other sentient beings.^[3] His main purpose in attaining enlightenment was to do this. Of all these activities, the greatest is his activity of voice or giving the teachings, which is called the Dharma. In Buddhist terminology, we call giving the teachings *turning the wheel of Dharma*. Just like a wheel that turns and carries passengers to their destination, the Buddha's teachings are a wheel that carries disciples to their destination. The realization that the Buddha accomplished is transferred to his disciples through the teachings when the disciples practice what the Buddha taught and use the techniques that the Buddha gave. Disciples of the Buddha can progress on the path and eventually attain liberation and enlightenment through the teachings.

As I said, the world has many religions and philosophies. While it is true that from one perspective everybody is the same—we all want to be free from suffering and we all desire

happiness—it is also true that we all have different tastes, mentalities, natures, propensities, and defilements. It is said that sentient beings are as limitless as space, and space has no end. Therefore, only one kind of teaching is not enough for all sentient beings.

It is like having many different medicines for diseases. We have many different medicines for different diseases, and we even have different systems of medicines. For some diseases, allopathic medicine is more effective, while for other diseases, ayurvedic, homeopathic, or some other form of medicine might be best. Just like this, having only one kind of teaching is not enough. The Buddha himself gave different kinds and levels of his teaching—teachings which are, in fact, innumerable. Speaking in outline, the different levels of the Buddha's teachings are the Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna.^[4] Within these paths, we find many different schools. Based on this fact, I think that the different religions are necessary for the world. Just like the world's different systems of medicine, different religions are helpful for different kinds of beings.

The Mind and the Body

According to the Buddhism, we all have a physical body and a mind, and these are very different from each other. We know

that the body arises from our parents, and we know how it develops and is maintained. In our human life, the body needs a place to live, food, shelter, clothes, medicines, friends, companions, and so on. However, the most important thing is our spiritual practice, and this deals with the mind rather than the body. Without spiritual practice, one's whole life will be empty and hollow, no matter how well one's material needs are satisfied.

We can see the body with our eyes and touch it with our hands. We can describe its size, color, shape, and so on. At the end of one's life, the body will be disposed of in one way or another. But the mind is something different. We cannot see the mind with our naked eyes. We cannot touch our minds with our hands. We cannot describe it in terms of color, shape, and size. In other words, the mind is empty, and yet the mind is the most powerful thing. It is from the mind that all the wrong things and all the right things that we do emerge. It is the mind that enjoys happiness, and it is the mind that suffers. Because the mind is empty, because it is an invisible and non-tangible thing, when we leave this world, the mind will not be disposed of like our bodies. The mind is not something that you can bury.

Where does the mind come from? How does it exist, and how is it maintained? Each and everything has its own causes and

conditions. The present mind, which is invisible, cannot arise from something material and visible like the physical body. It cannot arise from the elements, because we can see the elements. It must arise, then, from that which is continuous with it, not from something that is totally different, in the same way that to grow rice, you need to plant rice seed and not something else. You also need the right conditions for rice to grow: arable land, the right temperature, the right moisture level. Without the necessary conditions, the seed for anything will not ripen.

The mind is changing all the time, and yet it is also the same. The mind that you had when you were a baby and the mind that you have now are very different. Yet, there is also an unbroken continuity between them. It is like a river that is constantly changing but it remains the same. The water in the river runs in an ever-changing but continuous flow. The mind that we presently have is this continuity of consciousness, like the river, although it is changing all the time.

Because there is this line of continuity that does not arise from outer or material things but has its source in itself, we posit the existence of mind prior to our present mind and body, prior to this incarnation. This is how Buddhists demonstrate logically the existence of previous lives. If we examine further, we can

find that it goes all the way back, that there is no beginning and there is no end to mind. There is no particular time or place in which the mind of an individual suddenly came into being. Instead, the mind has existed from the beginning time. Mind is truly one of the wonders of the world, existing from beginningless time until now.

Saṃsāra and Impermanence

Although we have been born in many places in different forms, the continuity of the mind goes on and on from the past and into the future. The Buddhist term for this is saṃsāra, the cycle of existence and rebirth since beginningless time. Saṃsāra is sometimes called the wheel of saṃsāra because it goes on and on, like a wheel that turns around and around. Unless and until we attain enlightenment, we will go on this way in the wheel of saṃsāra without ceasing.

When we understand this, it becomes easy to develop the thought of renunciation and to turn to spiritual practice. Everything that seems important in this life is temporary and impermanent, when it is seen from the perspective of the endlessness of the wheel of saṃsāra. The Buddhas said, “All compounded things are impermanent.” The Buddha also taught what are called the four ends:

The end of gathering is separation.

The end of accumulation is exhaustion.

The end of height is to fall down.

The end of birth is death.

The end of gathering separation. Even here today, where many of us have come together from different places, our gathering will end in separation. We will return to the places we came from when the gathering is over.

The end of accumulation is exhaustion. We might accumulate great wealth and many other things, but one day, this will all be exhausted.

The end of height is falling down. Regardless how high a status you might reach or how powerful you become, you will not remain there forever. One day, you will fall when death comes. This is the fourth end: *The end of birth is death.*

It is fundamental for the spiritual path to remember that this life is only temporary. It is transitory and without essence. Even for the wealthiest billionaire or the most powerful person in the world, no matter how much prosperity one acquires or how much power, everyone will have to leave it all behind. Nothing

will remain with us, be it fame, power, or wealth, when leaving this world. We cannot take anything with us when death strikes. And at that time, the mind itself will not disappear but will continue.

Karma and Rebirth

When the mind continues, the virtuous deeds that we have performed will be carried forward with us according to the law of karma. *Karma* is a Sanskrit word that means action. The merit derived from the positive actions that we performed with a positive mind—things like loving-kindness, compassion, and tolerance—will help us in the future. Just like a shadow follows us wherever we go, our virtuous deeds will follow us. Likewise, negative or nonvirtuous actions, which are actions arising from negative emotions such as anger, ignorance, and jealousy, will also follow us wherever our consciousness goes.

The virtuous and nonvirtuous deeds that we do while we are alive will follow us after we die and will determine our next rebirth. If we perform virtuous deeds, we will continuously take rebirth in the three higher realms and have all positive things: longevity, good health, prosperity, wishes fulfilled, and a happy life. These are the products of positive actions.

Negative results—such as a short and unhealthy life, poverty, not fulfilling one’s wishes—are the products of negative deeds. In this way, our future life will be determined according to the kind of actions that we are doing in the present and have done in the past. If you commit negative deeds, then you may descend into one of the three lower realms. Even if you are not born into a lower realm, you will still meet negative results from nonvirtuous deeds. If you practice virtuous deeds, then you will continuously take rebirth in one of the three higher realms.

Wisdom

In order to refrain from nonvirtuous deeds and to practice virtuous deeds, we need wisdom. It is said in one of commentaries of a great Indian master, “The root of all the visible and invisible qualities lies in wisdom.” Without wisdom, we cannot know the causes of happiness and the causes of suffering. Everyone is seeking happiness, but so many fail to achieve it because they lack wisdom. It is said that the root defilement which causes all the obscurations is ignorance. The antidote to ignorance is wisdom. When one is endowed with wisdom, one knows the causes of both happiness and suffering.

Without considering the ultimate goal of attaining enlightenment, it is clear that we must make the right efforts

even if we only want to achieve ordinary happiness in this life and in future lives. There are many who, lacking wisdom, engage in negative deeds because they think that their nonvirtuous actions will lead to happiness. As a result, they are only creating more suffering. It is clear then that even for a simple path, wisdom is important.

In Buddhism, the highest form of wisdom is realizing the true nature of the mind, the true nature of reality. When we do this, we can totally abandon attachment to saṃsāra by recognizing the illusory dual vision that produces the obscurations in our minds. This is how one achieves the ultimate happiness of liberation and perfect enlightenment.

Small and Middling Paths

As I said, saṃsāra is the wheel of existence, or cyclic existence. It goes on and on like a wheel that turns. When we finish one round, another round starts. When this life ends, the next one begins. The whole of saṃsāra is permeated with suffering and dissatisfaction, but we do not recognize this. Of course, there are various degrees of suffering, so that some places have more suffering while others have less. When compared to a realm in saṃsāra with great suffering, some other realm can appear happy. But in reality, if we carefully examine all of saṃsāra, we will find that there is no real happiness.

In the teachings, the small person's path is the path of those who seek happiness within saṃsāra, not recognizing that it is all suffering. They may seek happiness in this life or seek happy future rebirths. The path is called "small" because the goal is still within saṃsāra, or the wheel of existence.

However, so long as we remain in the wheel of existence, there is only suffering. Wherever we go, whatever we do, whoever we associate with, there is no permanent satisfaction. We can see this fact even in our own experience in this life. It shows that our very existence in this universe is suffering.

The middling person's path is to recognize that there is no real happiness in any of the realms of saṃsāra, whether the lower realms or the higher realms. Whatever appears to be happiness in the higher realms is recognized as a mixture of happiness and suffering, pain and pleasure, in which the happiness will not last. When one has reached the path of the middling person, one seeks liberation from saṃsāra. Another word for this liberation is nirvāṇa.

To renounce saṃsāra totally and to attain individual liberation, you have to cut the root of saṃsāra, which is the basic ignorance that is to be eliminated. What is this ignorance? It is ignorance of the true nature of the mind, which is pure from

beginningless time. The true nature of the mind is buddha nature, never stained with obscurations. However, we do not see the true nature of the mind, and we cling to the self.

The Great Person's Path

To achieve the middling person's path is very good. But there is a third stage beyond the middling person's path called the path of the great person. It is higher than the middling path because it seeks liberation not just for oneself alone but for all sentient beings. Individual liberation results from realizing the wisdom that discerns ultimate reality and the nature of mind. The path of the great person is to combine wisdom with the cultivation of compassion and the creation of the thought of enlightenment. The great person renounces individual liberation in order to attain the highest enlightenment, or buddhahood, for the sake of all sentient beings.

To begin the great person's path, we must recognize that everyone is the same as we are in seeking happiness. Others are just like us in this regard. We can see, too, that we need others in this life, just like they need us. When we were children, we needed guardians—our parents and teachers—to guide us and to tell us what is right and wrong. Later, as adults, we need companions and friends from whom we can

ask advice and assistance. As we grow old, we will need more assistance from others. Just like this, in spiritual practice, it is not right to think only about oneself while ignoring everyone else. Instead, we should wish that all sentient beings will have happiness, just as we ourselves wish to be happy.

This wish that others will be happy is called loving-kindness in Buddhism. It is a step towards developing compassion, which is the wish to save others from suffering. If we examine honestly whether sentient beings are happy or not, we will find that they are not happy in their present state. Every sentient being undergoes suffering, whether it is physical pain, mental anxiety, general dissatisfaction, or all sorts of other miseries. Everyone longs for happiness, but they do not know where real happiness comes from.

To give rise to universal loving-kindness, first, we should think that all sentient beings are none other than our very dear ones—those whom we love, such as our parents, friends, or other relatives. Because we believe in the endless cycle of saṃsāra, it is logical that every sentient being has at one time or another been this dear person. If you practice seeing all sentient beings in this way, as the people who are so dear to you, then you can give rise to true loving-kindness.

We must include our most hated enemies in this practice. Although they appear to us in the form of enemies in this life, we must remember that they, too, were our dear ones in previous lives. We should always remember that every living being wants to be happy, regardless of who they are and regardless of their philosophy, religion, or ideology.

Next, we cultivate compassion, the sincere wish to eliminate the suffering of others. It means caring for beings who are suffering mentally and physically and desiring to help them and to save them. We understand that people are suffering because they lack wisdom and if they had perfect wisdom, then they would not suffer ever again. In this way, we wish that all sentient beings will attain enlightenment, because this is the only way that they will find true and lasting freedom from suffering.

The Thought of Enlightenment

Through cultivating such loving-kindness and compassion, we will develop ourselves the firm wish to attain enlightenment in order to liberate all sentient beings from suffering with any discrimination. As I said at the beginning, this is how the Buddha himself set upon the path of becoming a buddha. This wish is called the enlightenment mind, or bodhicitta. It is the only way to achieve buddhahood, which is the highest goal.

When we have cultivated real loving-kindness and compassion, then we will need to actually rescue beings from their suffering. Merely having good wishes and caring thoughts is not enough. How can we accomplish this? At the moment, we cannot do it because we do not have the power or the freedom to do it. We are bound by our defilements and our negative actions, or our karma. Wherever the winds of karma blow, we have no choice but to go there. We did not choose to be born here in this life, for example. We were born here because of our karma. In the future, we do not have a choice about where we are going to take rebirth. Our karma will determine this.

Someone completely bound by defilements and karma obviously cannot rescue other sentient beings. The only way to effectively and truly help sentient beings is to attain enlightenment for their sake, just like the Buddha did. He attained enlightenment for the sake of all beings, and he gave the teachings so that we can all do the same.

How Buddhahood is Possible: Buddha Nature

What is required to attain enlightenment? How is it possible? First of all, we can attain enlightenment because we all possess something called *buddha nature*, our potential for buddhahood, the seed of a buddha. It is really like growing a tree: you need

to sow the seed. The seed of your buddhahood is the true nature of your mind, which is never stained with obscurations. The true nature of your mind is pure right from the beginning. There is no difference between the true nature of your mind and the true nature of the wisdom of the buddhas. They are the same.

The one and only great difference between our minds and the wisdom of the buddhas is that the buddhas have eliminated the obscurations. This shows itself as a vast difference. It is like the difference between the sky and the earth. But when the obscurations are cleared, then the immeasurable great qualities of buddhahood will be obtained by every ordinary sentient being.

This is possible because on the ultimate level, there is no difference in nature between ordinary beings and buddhas. At the moment, we cannot see our buddha nature, and we cling to the self. This results in the obscurations of defilements and knowledge. Since these obscurations prevent us from seeing the true nature of our minds, we cannot develop the great qualities of buddhahood.

Buddhahood requires the right methods. We all possess the seed of buddhahood, but if we do not employ methods

to remove the obscurations, then we will never attain enlightenment. Employing the right methods refers to the accumulation of merit and wisdom.

Merit is compassion to help all sentient beings without any exception, and wisdom is the wisdom that sees ultimate reality. Another way to describe the path of accumulating merit and wisdom is through the six pāramitās, or perfections. These are practices to ripen buddhahood through the activities of a bodhisattva.

The first is the perfection of generosity, which means giving material gifts, love, the Dharma, and protection. The second is the perfection of moral conduct and good discipline, or abstaining from wrong deeds and nonvirtuous deeds that arise from defilements like ignorance, desire, and attachment. The third perfection is patience. The fourth perfection is diligence. The fifth perfection is meditative concentration. The sixth perfection is wisdom, which refers to the wisdom of seeing the ultimate reality.

Of these, the sixth is the most important—wisdom. The others are the way to achieve it. Moreover, wisdom *perfects* the practice of the others. For example, without wisdom, generosity is not the perfection of generosity. To have the perfection of

generosity, one must cultivate the non-dual wisdom that see ultimate reality. The perfection of generosity is being able to give without the obscuration of ignorance that sees the duality of self and other. The same applies to the other five perfections.

Like Two Wings

We all possess the seed of buddhahood and perfect wisdom because we all possess the buddha nature as our potential for buddhahood. If a rice seed is kept in a dry box, however, it will never yield rice. To grow the rice, you need to create the favorable circumstances for the seed to sprout—by putting the seed in fertile ground, watering it, by maintaining the right temperature, adding fertilizer, and so on. Likewise, to grow our buddha nature, we must make efforts to practice the six perfections and accumulate merit and wisdom.

Whichever level of the path one follows, cultivating nondual wisdom is really the essential thing. Without it, there is no way to accomplish any level of the Buddhist spiritual path, let alone the perfect enlightenment of buddhahood. Similarly, all Buddhist teachings are based on compassion. This is especially true of the Mahāyāna tradition, which emphasizes the bodhisattva path. Compassion is crucial in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end after attaining enlightenment.

Wisdom and compassion are said to be like two wings. To fly in the sky, you need both wings. To attain enlightenment you need both wisdom and compassion. These two wings depend on each other for their completion. Without wisdom one cannot have proper compassion, and without compassion, one cannot accomplish wisdom. When the two are present, then one can attain enlightenment.

With this, I will conclude my talk. There are still a few minutes left, so if you have questions, I will be happy to answer them.

Questions and Answers

Q: I've been meditating for a long time, like many other people here. I've worked on practicing the six perfections and other practices, and yet I still feel so far from attaining enlightenment. In the West, we have a concept of "surrendering to God's will." Could you discuss that from the Buddhist perspective? How can we do this as Buddhists? I sometimes feel like I'm hopeless.

A: I think that you have already started on the path, and this already means good progress. We shouldn't become discouraged. It naturally takes long time before we will feel any accomplishment. As I mentioned, we have been caught in saṃsāra from beginningless time, and to become free from saṃsāra is not something that will happen in a brief span of time.

There is no miracle that can make it happen. According to Buddhism, the Buddha has given us the greatest help possible, the teachings. He does not save us through miracles. It is not like that. Instead, the Buddha gave teachings on the law of

karma, or cause and effect, explaining that our lives are the products of our actions. If we commit wrong deeds, then praying to the Buddha will not save us. Instead, he gave instructions on the right way and the wrong way so that we can avoid the wrong path and take the right one. If we travel on the right way, then we will save ourselves. The Buddha said: “You are your own savior. Nobody else can save you.”

It is like a sick person encountering a doctor. To cure the disease, it is important to have a good doctor, but the patient also must work hard and follow the doctor’s orders, taking the right medicines and performing the prescribed behaviors. If you have the best doctor in the world, but you don’t follow his instructions, then the disease will not be cured. In just this way, we have to make efforts ourselves.

Q: Is there a concept in Buddhism like the idea of intuition, a divine spark within us, or a still, small voice that speaks? In the West, this is a strong aspect of Quakerism. In Hinduism, there is the idea of brahman relating through the ātman. Is there a similar concept in Buddhism, like a guiding voice or genius inside each person to which you can listen to find out what it is telling you specifically?

A: I do not think there is a separate being that could guide you. However, we all have buddha nature, which is the basic nature of the mind, the pure clarity of the mind. The Buddha emphasizes analyzing for oneself using your own intelligence. With our own wisdom, we must carefully examine each and every thing. With this intelligence or wisdom, we can receive the teachings, and so through them we can gain more and more wisdom. Then, with the combination of wisdom and compassion, we can find the way to enlightenment.

Q: I wonder if you could describe some of the qualities of wisdom.

A: When you possess wisdom, you are able to perform the right deeds and abstain from nonvirtuous deeds and attain positive results in life. Then, by practicing meditation, you can attain personal liberation. Then, by practicing the six pāramitās, you can attain enlightenment. In all of these, the root lies in wisdom. Without wisdom, you cannot accomplish anything.

Q: You've explained that we have many previous lives and incarnations. If we are facing death, and illness is ravaging the

body, how can we prepare? How can we prepare the mind to accept that? Also, should we just accept it, or can we try instead to practice positive thinking? Can this heal us in the case of a terminal illness, or something that's devastating to our health? Can we overcome it through these teachings, or is the teaching just about preparing for death by accepting it?

A: Yes, there are many practices for preparing for death, also for a long life. But you see, death is something that we cannot avoid. Nobody wants to die, but at the same time, nobody can escape from it. We will have to face it, sooner or later.

The best way to prepare for death is to realize that the time of death is a very important transition for the mind. At the time of transition, having a negative mind is very dangerous. It can lead to suffering. At the time of death, remember that there is no point in being panicked, because you cannot avoid death. One should be relaxed. On this basis, you can generate a positive mind, with thoughts of loving-kindness and compassion to all sentient beings. This will certainly direct the mind toward positive qualities.

Q: What do you mean by meditating on emptiness?

A: Ordinary people are not bothered to ask about or find out about reality, to ask what is the ultimate truth. They accept things as we see and experience them in ordinary, conventional life. But more intelligent beings try to examine why it is like this, why we are here, and what is the nature of reality.

Reality is not as we see it. Reality is something else, and what we see is like a dream. When we are dreaming, what we experience is as real to us as regular life. In our dreams, we can experience strong feelings of joy and sorrow. But when we are awake from the dream, there is not a single sign of what we saw in the dream. The present life is like this. It is like a dream, and the reality is not this dream. It is away from the present appearance.

If examined carefully, one finds that ultimate reality is beyond description. It is beyond existence, non-existence, both and neither. It is inexpressible in words. This is referred to with the word emptiness. It does not mean emptiness in the sense of nothingness. It is not saying that ultimately there is nothingness. Emptiness refers to the absence of any inherent existence to what exists. In this view, there is no *nothingness*, either. Emptiness is the name for this inexpressible quality of

ultimate reality that is beyond description, beyond existence, non-existence, both and neither.

Q: When you meditate on emptiness, what is that experience? What are you meditating *on*? How do you connect with the emptiness? What are you thinking about?

A: As ordinary persons, we cannot experience the ultimate truth right way when we meditate. We must go step by step. The first step is to recognize that all phenomena do not exist as they appear. Then, you can go to the second step, which is to recognize that the not-existing is also not the reality.

Ultimate reality is beyond the four extremes—of existence, non-existence, both and neither. The true experience of ultimate reality is reached only by those beings who have attained what is called the noble stage.

Notes

[1] Sanskrit *bodhicitta*. Also translated as *enlightenment mind*, *mind of awakening*, etc.

[2] The obscurations are usually classified as two. They are the *obscurations of defilements* and the *obscurations of knowledge*. The obscurations of defilements (Skt. *kleśāvaraṇa*, Tib. *nyon mongs pa'i sgrib pa*) are the afflictive emotions, sometimes called the negative emotions, like desire and anger. These prevent the realization of the selflessness of persons by reinforcing the experience of self and other. The obscurations of knowledge (Skt. *jñeyāvaraṇa*, Tib. *shes bya'i sgrib pa*) obscure the primordial wisdom of the mind, preventing the realization of the true nature of reality. The elimination of the two kinds of obscurations results in buddhahood.

[3] One way to understand buddhahood is as the transformation of the ordinary body, speech, and mind of a practitioner, which are sometimes called the three doors, into the transcendent body, speech, and wisdom of a buddha. These correspond to the three *kāyas*, or bodies, of a buddha: the *nirmāṇakāya* (manifestation body), the *sambhogakāya* (enjoyment body), and the *dharmakāya* (truth body).

[4] The Small Vehicle, the Large Vehicle, and the Vajra Vehicle. The traditional Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna distinction describes two kinds of motivation for practice: practice for personal liberation and practice for the liberation of all sentient beings. This distinction differs from one made between geographical schools of Buddhism. The Vajrayāna, sometimes called tantric Buddhism, is part of the Mahāyāna in terms of motivation, but it has special practices.



■ 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.



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

<https://sakyatradition.org>

2023©All Rights Reserved