



Why the Mind Matters: Realizing Relative and Ultimate Truths

His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche



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By the merit of this work, may Their Holiness the Sakya Trichen and Sakya Trizin enjoy perfect health and very long lives, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.

Durian, either you love it or hate it. Why do some people adore something so much, while others dislike it? When encountering a tragedy, some are completely overwhelmed with emotion, while others remain calm?

Everything is mind, explains it all. If we have a good grasp of this profound view, we will be able to maneuver along the path skillfully toward happiness.

It is, however, easier said than done. In this text, using examples in our daily lives, His Holiness gives a clear explanation on this topic, making it easy for us to comprehend so we can take better control of our lives.

EVERYTHING IS MIND



Why the Mind Matters: Realizing Relative and Ultimate Truths

We can say that in general the experience of suffering depends on how we respond to the problems or challenges we face—how we handle our situation. For example, if two people experience the same suffering or face the same challenges, but one is a Dharma practitioner and the other is just an ordinary person, then although they face the same problems, their way of handling their situation will be different, and so their suffering will be different. The one who faces his or her challenges with knowledge of the Dharma will have less suffering. Of course, this requires not only knowledge about Dharma, but putting the Dharma into practice. To handle problems and face challenges in a skillful way, you first need to gain knowledge of the Dharma through study and then put your intellectual understanding into action.

Lord Buddha gave an enormous number of teachings, and the purpose of all of them is to subdue the mind, or to tame the

mind. The great ācārya and bodhisattva Śāntideva said, in his text called *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*, that if we tame the mind, then we will be free from all fear and we will possess all virtues. If we control our minds, we can overcome all fearful beings, according to Śāntideva. We can overcome obstacles like tigers, or lions, or elephants, and other fearful animals. We can also overcome enemies and evil spirits. We can overcome all these obstacles and fearful ones simply by controlling our minds.

Śāntideva said that we cannot cover the whole universe with skin or leather, but we can cover our own two feet. What this means is that we can defeat our obstacles and problems simply by changing our minds. We cannot defeat all obstacles externally, but the equivalent of this can be achieved, just like putting leather on your feet accomplishes the same thing as covering the whole universe in leather. Happiness and suffering do not depend on external factors but on our own minds and mental states.

If we have strong attachment to the mundane world, then we will feel our problems more strongly. If we do not have strong attachment, then we will not feel as much suffering even when we encounter great problems. For example, if you lose some object that has no value to you, then you will not feel sad. But if you lose a precious object, you will feel sad. The feeling is not

dependent on the object but on the mind. If you buy a plastic plate or a cup for one-time use, you will throw it away and not feel sad because there is no attachment to it. But if you buy something precious to you, like a car or a house, then you will feel great sadness if you lose it because of your attachment. When there is more attachment, there will be more suffering, and when there is less attachment, there will be less suffering. Having attachment to objects means having attachment to saṃsāra. According to Mañjuśrī in his four-line teaching called *Parting from the Four Attachments*, “If you have attachment to saṃsāra, you do not have renunciation thought.”

Sometimes the same object will produce different feelings of attachment for only circumstantial reasons. In Spain, saffron is not rare. It can be bought anywhere. If you lose your saffron in Spain, you will not be sad, while if you lose it in a place where saffron is rare, then you will suffer. The same object, saffron, produces different feelings simply because of your degree of attachment. This, too, shows that the suffering we experience does not depend upon the object but on our response. It depends on the mind and how we look at the object.

Everything is mind, and this is why learning to tame or control the mind is key. Although the Buddha gave an enormous number of teachings to help us subdue our minds, we can say

generally that he taught the two truths: the relative truth and the ultimate truth. If we know these two truths and meditate upon them, then we can overcome the sufferings and problems of this life and of the next life, and even overcome the whole of saṃsāra. Meditation on the two truths will help us attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings, gaining ultimate happiness, ultimate wisdom, ultimate power, and all good qualities.

The reality of the relative truth refers to all the phenomena that we now see as existing although they are not truly existent. They are like reflections in a mirror, or a magical show, or a dream. At the moment, we do not see this, and so we cling to appearances as truly existent. We have strong grasping thoughts and clinging towards these phenomena, not seeing the reality of the relative truth. Clinging to them as truly existent, we become materialistic and focused on the outer world rather than on our own minds.

The phenomena of relative truth are not truly existent. All the phenomena that we experience or see arise from their own causes and conditions. All phenomena appear as the result of interdependent origination. In the modern world, we say that it has grown smaller, meaning that we can see now how we are dependent on each other. It is the same thing as the

interdependent origination of phenomena, which means that phenomena are not truly existent. If something were truly existent, then it would exist independently, not arising in dependence upon other things that act as causes and conditions. But instead, all things arise through interdependent origination, and everything depends upon causes and conditions.

[Question] – Rinpoche said that in the world now, we can feel more the reality of interdependence. But is this really the same thing as the Buddhist doctrine of interdependence?

[His Holiness] – Actually, yes. It is interdependent origination. And we need to know this. Interdependent origination means that things are compounded and not truly existent. Whenever things are compounded, it means that they are impermanent and lack inherent existence. They depend upon other factors to appear or arise. Whatever arises this way is subject to ceasing. In other words, impermanent. For example, any being who is born in the world will die. There is not a single person who is born and will never die. This applies to material objects, too. That which is produced will finally cease or be destroyed, and nothing is permanent. Even the most solid structure of iron will cease to exist or can be destroyed.

Everything is impermanent and like a dream. Lord Buddha said in a sūtra that if a young lady dreams of having a child or a son, she will be very happy in her dream. Then, if this son or child dies in the dream, she will feel very sad and experience great suffering. In reality, no son has been born, and no son has died. Lord Buddha says in the sūtra that the woman's happiness and sadness were the product of her dream, and he says that all phenomena are like this.

We likewise have good and bad dreams that produce feelings of happiness and sadness. When we wake from sleep, we cease to feel these things because we are able to recognize that the dream was not true. In the awakened state, we can see that the phenomena of the dream were unreal. In the same way, it is possible to see the reality of the relative truth as like a dream, to see that our ordinary vision of phenomena is like a dream. At the moment, however, although we can recognize our dreams as dreams, we still think of ordinary waking life as the truth. This is because we have a strong propensity to do this. This explains, too, how we can have such different perceptions.

It is important to discover the reality of relative truth because it can definitely lessen our suffering. With this insight, we can definitely control our minds and reduce our negative thoughts. Then, with this awareness as a basis, we know the reality of the ultimate truth, and this will completely eliminate negative thoughts from our mental continuum.

Recognizing ultimate truth means attaining a state which is free from the extremes. This begins with an analysis that shows there is no inherent self or inherent existence. If you analyze thoroughly your body to discover the self, you will not find it anywhere. Śāntideva says in the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*: “The teeth are not the self, the hair is not the self, the nails are not

the self,” and so on. When you have a car and you say “my car,” you are not the car. In the same way, when you say “my self,” how can you be the owner and the thing owned? In reality, there is no self as an independent entity that can be found.

In the reality of the relative truth there is a self that exists like a dream or a magical show. In the ultimate truth, there is no self at all. We cannot find a self. This is referred to as emptiness, but it does not mean simply empty. Ultimate reality is beyond the extremes of both existence and non-existence. If we cling to emptiness as a state of nonexistence, then we fall into the extreme of nihilism. The actual ultimate truth is beyond the two extremes, the extreme of eternalism and the extreme of nihilism.

In short, by knowing the reality of the relative truth, we can suppress our negative thoughts which are the cause of our suffering. By knowing the reality of the ultimate truth, we can completely eliminate these negative thoughts from mind—or from our awareness, which might be a better word for it.



- His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, is the eldest son of His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (the 41st Sakya Trizin). Renowned for his erudition and the clarity of his teachings, His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin is regarded as one of the most highly qualified lineage holders in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. He belongs to the noble Khön family, whose successive generations have provided an unbroken lineage of outstanding Buddhist masters.

Since his youth, His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin has received an ocean of sutra and tantra teachings, empowerments, transmissions, and pith instructions from His Holiness the Sakya Trichen, as well as many other learned and accomplished masters. After years of rigorous philosophy studies at Sakya College in India, he was awarded the kachupa degree. And starting from the age of twelve, he has completed numerous meditation retreats, including the Hevajra retreat. With utmost humility, he travels extensively to bestow teachings and empowerments at the request of students across the globe.



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