



Parting from the Four Attachments

His Holiness the Sakya Trichen



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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.



EDITORIAL PREFACE

The goal of all Buddha's teachings is to guide us to overcome all suffering and attain ultimate happiness, the state of buddhahood.

However, accomplishing this goal is not easy due to our attachments—to ourselves and everything else—which prolong the journey, making it more challenging and bumpier. Because of these attachments, we generate numerous afflictions, necessitating an extensive array of teachings to counteract them.

Ordinary beings are attached to this life, to saṃsāra, to personal gain, and to the belief in the inherent existence of a “self.” As a result, we not only experience various sufferings but also create more negative karma, trapping ourselves in the endless cycle of suffering—saṃsāra.

To liberate ourselves from saṃsāra, we must sever all attachments that bind us to it. Mañjuśrī condensed the key to removing attachment into four lines, which he transmitted to Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, the first patriarch of the Sakya school. These four lines encapsulate the essence of the Mahāyāna teachings. In this text, His Holiness elaborates on how these four attachments can be effectively countered through seemingly basic practices, establishing a connection with our inherent limitless wisdom.

For those who have yet to embark on the Dharma path, in today's materialistic world, many are consumed by fame and gain, caught up in endless pursuits. The insight offered by *Parting from the Four Attachments* enables us to discern through these superficial illusions, uncover inner peace, and become masters of our own minds, thereby navigating life as truly happy and successful individuals.

May all attain the wisdom of Mañjuśrī, eliminating all attachments and defilements.



CONTENT

Introduction	1
Preliminary Part	5
Main Part	11
Conclusion	18

Introduction

Today, here with Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche and all his disciples and students, I would like to take this opportunity to express my great pleasure in meeting you all and to wish all of you the best of everything. I truly admire Rinpoche's many Dharma activities and his service throughout the world, activities that have caused many people to benefit through study, contemplation, and meditation.

I have been asked to say some words about the teachings. You have already heard so many teachings that there is no need to add anything more, so I will say just a couple of words. The great Lord Buddha gave an enormous number of teachings, and all of them were given to train our minds—to make our minds clearer and more virtuous so that we will all eventually become fully enlightened. That is the primary purpose for which the Buddha taught.

Although there are many different kinds of teachings—the sūtras, commentaries, and others—mind-training teachings

are the most effective teachings, or the most relevant for this critical time. Therefore, I would like to say just a few words about the mind-training teaching known as *Parting from the Four Attachments*. This teaching was given directly by Mañjuśrī to the great Lama Sakyapa Kunga Nyingpo when he was young. When he was a boy, Lama Sakyapa's master told him that he should study and that in order to study, he would need wisdom. To acquire wisdom, he told Lama Sakyapa to propitiate Mañjuśrī, the manifestation of the wisdom of all the buddhas. In fact, Lama Sakyapa himself was an emanation of Mañjuśrī who took a human form for the sake of instructing sentient beings.

Following the advice of his teacher, Lama Sakyapa entered into a Mañjuśrī retreat to acquire wisdom. After completing a six-month retreat, Mañjuśrī and two other bodhisattvas appeared to him in person in a vision filled with light, and the main Mañjuśrī spoke these four lines to Lama Sakyapa:

ཚེ་འདི་ལ་ཞེན་ན་ཚེས་པ་མིན། །

tshe 'di la zhen na chos pa min

*If you have attachment to this life,
you are not a religious (or a dharmic) person.*

འཁོར་བ་ལ་ཞེན་ན་ངེས་འབྱུང་མིན།།

'khor ba la zhen na nges 'byung min

*If you have attachment to the realm of existence,
you do not have true renunciation.*

བདག་དོན་ལ་ཞེན་ན་བྱང་སེམས་མིན།།

bdag don la zhen na byang sems min

*If you have attachment to self-purpose,
you do not have bodhicitta.*

འཇོན་པ་བྱུང་ན་ལྷ་བ་མིན།།

'dzin pa byung na lta ba min

If grasping arises, you do not have the view.

This instruction is very short—only four lines—but it contains the entire path of the Mahāyāna. Through this mind-training instruction, the great Lama Sakyapa attained great realization. He later gave the teaching to his sons and disciples, and they passed it on to their disciples, and so on until the present time. The *Parting from the Four Attachments* is used as a preliminary teaching in all Sakya monasteries. It is influential and well-known beyond the Sakyas, too. All traditions of

Tibetan Buddhism recognize it as an important mind-training teaching, and it has been taught in nearly all of the traditions of Tibetan Buddhism.

The teaching has three parts: preliminary, main part, and conclusion.

Preliminary Part

The preliminary part, consisting of refuge and the creation of the enlightenment thought, is not made explicit in the four lines. However, it is obvious that as a Buddhist, the first step that one takes when entering the Dharma path is refuge. Refuge has different traditions and levels, according to the Hīnayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna.

We say that there are four special characteristics of Mahāyāna refuge.

1. Cause
2. Object
3. Duration
4. Purpose

The first special characteristic of refuge is the cause. Generally speaking, the causes of taking refuge are three: fear, faith, and

compassion. Fear refers to fear of the suffering of saṃsāra. Faith is faith in the Triple Gem. And compassion means compassion towards all sentient beings. All three causes are important in the Mahāyāna teachings, but compassion is the most important. Compassion is essential because it makes a Mahāyāna teaching Mahāyāna. In the Mahāyāna, every practice that you do is not for your sake alone but for the sake of all other sentient beings. For this, you need great compassion.

The second special characteristic of Mahāyāna refuge is the object of refuge. Although the object of refuge is the same in all the Buddhist traditions—we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—the understanding of these things is different. According to the Mahāyāna, the Buddha refers to the Buddha possessing the three kāyas: dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya.

Dharmakāya means the *body of reality*. This means having the double purity. For all of us, the nature of our minds is pure. Every sentient being has *buddha nature*, which is another way of talking about natural purity. The nature of the mind of every sentient being is pure, primordially unstained and without obscurations. At the moment, however, we do not see that. We lack the second kind of purity. Our minds are completely covered over with obscurations: the obscuration

of defilement and the obscuration of knowledge. We lack the accumulations of great merit and wisdom that will eliminate all these forms of obscurations. When we have attained them, we will have attained the second purity. Although it arises from the elimination of the two obscurations, the dharmakāya is not something that we gain from the outside but is the natural purity when it is revealed or manifested. This is the dharmakāya.

The saṃbhogakāya means the *body of enjoyment*. Through the accumulation of merit, the ordinary physical body will be transformed into the buddha's body with the thirty-two signs and eighty qualities. The ordinary voice will be transformed into a buddha's voice with the sixty branches of the melody of Brahma. The ordinary mind will be transformed into omniscient wisdom that realizes the ultimate truth as well as the relative truth.

The saṃbhogakāya possesses the five certainties:

1. The certainty of place means the highest Akaniṣṭha realm, where all buddhas acquire the saṃbhogakāya.
2. The certainty of body means having the thirty-two signs and eighty qualities.

3. The certainty of the teachings means the Mahāyāna teachings, which are taught by buddhas in saṃbhogakāya form.
4. The certainty of time means that the saṃbhogakāya is beyond all birth and death.
5. The certainty of the disciples refers to highly-realized bodhisattvas.

Nirmāṇakāya means the *body of emanations*. This is different from the saṃbhogakāya with the five certainties. The nirmāṇakāyas are manifested by buddhas in whatever place and in whatever form is required to benefit beings. The historical Shakyamuni Buddha was actually a nirmāṇakāya. He was a kind of nirmāṇakāya called an *excellent nirmāṇakāya* because even ordinary people could see him as a buddha.

The Dharma has two parts: the teachings and the realizations. The teachings are the Tripitaka: the vinaya, the abhidharma, and the sūtras. For the Mahāyāna, realization means especially the realization of the great buddhas and bodhisattvas who have attained enlightenment and the true Mahāyāna Dharma. The Saṅgha means the bodhisattvas, or those who have entered the Mahāyāna path to enlightenment; this is the special characteristic of the Saṅgha as a Mahāyāna object of refuge.

The third special characteristic of Mahāyāna refuge is the specialty of duration. This refers to the time for which we take refuge. According to the Mahāyāna, we take refuge from this moment until enlightenment is reached. This is because our ultimate goal is to attain full enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

The fourth special characteristic of Mahāyāna refuge is the purpose for which we take refuge. The purpose is for the sake of liberating all sentient beings and bringing them to the stage of buddhahood.

Generating Bodhicitta

The second preliminary practice is creating bodhicitta, or enlightenment mind. Sentient beings are limitless, just like space has no limit. We believe in rebirth. There is not only this life; all sentient beings have taken rebirth from beginningless time until now. All of us have had an enormous, countless number of past lives, and it will be the same in the future unless and until we attain liberation or enlightenment. We will continue to be reborn, always in a different place with different parents, in a different family, in an endless cycle of rebirth. Because of this endless cycle, every sentient being has been your own dear father, your own dear mother, and

so on. However, at the moment, we do not recognize each other because of the change of life. We see some people as our friends, some as our enemies, and others are indifferent to us, when in reality, every sentient being—including our enemies—are our mothers and our fathers.

It is our duty to help all sentient beings and to try to save them from the suffering of saṃsāra and lead them to the path of enlightenment. As ordinary humans, however, we are unable to do this. We don't have the ability because we don't possess enough wisdom, compassion, and power. If we wish to do this, then we need to attain enlightenment. When we have reached enlightenment, then we will be able to save countless beings even in a single moment. Through sight, touch, hearing, or remembrance, we will be able to benefit an enormous number of sentient beings, and this is why our aim is to attain full enlightenment. Creating the enlightenment mind means wishing to attain enlightenment, as I just described, for the benefit of all sentient beings. Then, in order to realize the wish, one enters the bodhisattva path and engages in the practice of Dharma.

Main Part

The first line says,

If you have attachment to this life,

you are not a religious (or a dharmic) person.

This line tells us directly the right way and wrong way to practice Dharma. The wrong way to practice is with attachment for the sake of this life. If you study, contemplate, or meditate for the sake of this life, then you are not practicing true Dharma. It may appear to be the Dharma, but it is not real Dharma. Real Dharma means that you are practicing—at the very least—for the sake of the next life, and not for this life.

This life is very short. It is rare for anyone to live to be even one hundred years old. A human life is a short span of time, and it is very fragile, like a bubble that can burst at any moment. Therefore, it is not worthy of having attachment. The right way to practice Dharma is to realize, at the least, that this life

is not worthy of attachment. Whatever practice you do should be done, at the least, for the sake of the next life. Therefore, the first thing we must do is give up attachment to this life, which is fragile, short, essence-less, purposeless, and unworthy of attachment. It only shows us the need to practice Dharma.

To practice Dharma, you should contemplate the difficulty of obtaining a precious human life. Every sentient being possesses buddha nature and therefore every sentient being has the potential to become a buddha if they can meet with the right methods. A human life, endowed with the eighteen prerequisites, gives sentient beings the best chance for practicing the Dharma. The eighteen prerequisites include having freedom from eight unfavorable circumstances and having the ten favorable conditions, five from your own side and five from the side of the other.

The eighteen prerequisites are difficult to obtain from the points of view of cause, number, example, and nature. To have not only a human life but one that is endowed with the eighteen prerequisites is a precious opportunity, difficult to obtain, and gained through our prayers and through our merits. There can be no greater loss than losing this opportunity. By contemplating this, you will develop the need to practice Dharma.

Secondly, because everything is impermanent, you also should realize the need to practice Dharma quickly and without any delay. Everyone can see very clearly that the world is changing. Our bodies are changing, and our minds are changing. Life is impermanent. Anyone who was born into this world will have to die. Yet nobody is able to determine when they will die. Of course, there are certain masters with clairvoyance who can see when they will die, but this is rare. Things like accidents can happen to us at any time, and we can lose our human lives at any moment. Therefore, we need to practice the Dharma and do so quickly and without any delay.

The second line says,

*If you have attachment to the realm of existence,
you do not have true renunciation.*

The *realm of existence* is made up of the *kāmadhātu* , the *rūpadhātu* , and the *arūpadhātu*. ^[1] Then, there are the six realms in the universe or *saṃsāra*: the three lower realms and three higher realms. If you are born into the lower realms, there is unimaginable suffering. In the higher realms, unless we examine them closely, we will find a mixture of pleasure and pain. However, there is no true pleasure in these realms when we examine them carefully. These apparent pleasures, in reality, are another form of suffering.

Therefore, the second line says that to practice Dharma for the sake of obtaining a higher rebirth but still remaining in one of the six realms is not proper renunciation. To have proper renunciation means to realize that the entire universe, and not only the three lower realms, are of the nature of suffering. Proper renunciation means to realize this, or to renounce the entire world and seek liberation from the realm of existence.

To have attachment to the realm of existence is not right. It is like eating sweet-tasting poison. Some poisons are sweet, and they will cause tremendous harm if you consume them. Having attachment to the higher realms is like this. They look nice and pleasurable, but having attachment to them will cause tremendous harm in the future.

This line directly indicates the suffering of saṃsāra. Indirectly, it points to the law of cause and effect: why we have been born here, why we experience what we do, and who created this. Only you are responsible for your being born in this life and for the experiences that you have. It is the result of your karma, your own deeds. If you have negative karma and nonvirtuous deeds, you will fall into the lower realms; if you have positive or virtuous deeds, you will be born in the higher realms. We divide actions into three: virtuous deeds, nonvirtuous deeds, and indifferent deeds, which are actions that are neither

virtuous nor nonvirtuous. What we must do is abstain from negative deeds, practice virtuous deeds, and transform indifferent deeds into virtuous ones.

The third line says,

*If you have attachment to self-purpose,
you do not have bodhicitta.*

This line directly indicates bodhicitta, or the fundamental bodhisattva practice of giving up self-clinging. From beginningless time until now, we have only cared about ourselves. We have always thought only about our own well-being, and yet all we have achieved is more and more suffering. The buddhas and bodhisattvas have given up their own purpose and devoted themselves entirely—their lives and their time and energy—to the benefit of all sentient beings. Doing so, they have accomplished complete peace and great bliss.

The path of the bodhisattva is to give up attachment to one's own purpose. The main practice for this is the meditation of exchanging self and other, which means to give all of one's own pleasure, one's own virtues, one's own good thing to mother sentient beings and then to take all mother sentient beings' suffering and misfortunes onto oneself. By this practice, you destroy self-cherishing thoughts. Once there are no self-

cherishing thoughts, you will gain real peace. To seek liberation for yourself alone and to ignore mother sentient beings is not right. Attaining liberation for yourself alone will not develop your own full qualities; self-liberation is the biggest obstacle to attaining enlightenment.

If you have attachment to self-purpose, it can cause great harm in the long run, like raising your enemy's sons. In the long run, it will cause you great suffering.

The fourth line says,

If grasping arises, you do not have the view.

These are very short words, but their meaning is very elaborate. This line refers to wisdom. For a bird to fly in the sky, it needs two wings. Similarly, to attain enlightenment, you need both method and wisdom. The method is bodhicitta, and wisdom is knowing the ultimate truth of all phenomena. There are many different views because many different schools have tried to explain the ultimate truth at different levels. The highest view is the Madhyamaka or the Middle Way view. According to the Madhyamaka, ultimate truth is beyond perception, beyond explanation, beyond words. If you grasp at anything, such as *existing or non-existing, both or neither*, then you do not have the right view, because ultimate reality

is beyond perception, beyond grasping, beyond explanation. Grasping at anything means you do not have the view.

This line directly indicates insight wisdom. Indirectly, it points to the basis for acquiring wisdom, which is the practice of concentration. Without concentration, you cannot meditate on insight wisdom. In the beginning, concentration should be practiced with an object and eventually without an object, or resting in the clarity of the mind without any interference from adventitious thoughts. At the moment, our ordinary minds are very busy. The mind is a stream of thoughts. On the basis of such a busy mind, you cannot practice wisdom meditation. You must pacify thoughts and remain in complete calm or single-pointedness, and then you can meditate on the absolute truth, or insight wisdom.

By combining method practice and wisdom practice, like the two wings of a bird, eventually you will accomplish enlightenment. Eventually, through giving up attachment to this life, the realm of existence, and self-purpose, and through attaining wisdom, you will accomplish buddhahood and the three kāyas that I explained when I discussed refuge: the dharmakāya, saṃbhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya. You will be able to perform unceasing activities—unceasing like a wheel—that will benefit all sentient beings.

Conclusion

The main message that I want to convey is the importance of studying the Dharma thoroughly. And then, after studying, you have to practice it. Otherwise, it would be like learning how to cook excellent food and preparing the dishes, but then not eating. Similarly, when you have acquired knowledge of the Dharma, you should practice it in your life, twenty-four hours a day, and with your body, voice, and mind. If you practice Dharma this way, so that it is the purpose of your life, then you will have rightly used this opportunity of your precious human life, which is so difficult to obtain.

With this, I conclude my brief talk. I hope and pray that Rinpoche will live very long and continue to turn the wheel of his Dharma activities throughout the world. I wish good health, long life, and the fulfillment of your wishes to all the disciples here and also to your guru. May the blessings of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha be with you now and always. Thank you.

Notes:

[1] The desire realm, form realm, and formless realm, respectively.



■ 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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