



A Brief Hagiography of Sakya Paṇḍita

His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche



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Acknowledgement

His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, delivered this talk on January 16, 2022, at Tsechen Kunchab Ling, U.S.A., in commemoration of the mahāparinirvāṇa anniversary of Sakya Paṇḍita. In 2025, this English text of the teaching 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 Sakya Tradition team also translated the text into the Chinese language.

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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.

EDITORIAL PREFACE



Sakya Paṇḍita, the fourth Sakya patriarch, was renowned for his profound knowledge and exceptional wisdom. He was bestowed with the esteemed title of "Paṇḍita," a term rooted in India that signifies a scholar of extraordinary erudition. What distinguished him, earning renown across the Tibetan region and enabling him to transcend the boundaries of traditions and schools? Why was he venerated as one of the three great manifestations of Mañjuśrī in the Land of Snow?

The noble qualities and extraordinary virtues of Sakya Paṇḍita defy the limits of language to fully convey. While various biographies illuminate the details of his life, how can we truly comprehend the magnitude of his contributions and achievements?

Drawing from the praise composed by the Sakya master Yarlungpa Sengé Gyaltzen, His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin offers a heartfelt account of Sakya Paṇḍita's legacy. May this text inspire all to awaken wisdom, emulate Sakya Paṇḍita's union of compassion and wisdom, and aspire toward greater virtue and profound understanding.

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Yarlungpa Sengé Gyaltzen

ཚེས་རྗེ་ས་པའ་ལ་བསྟོན་པ།

ཤེས་བྱ་ཐམས་ཅད་གཞིགས་པའི་སྤྱན་ཡངས་པ།
 འགྲོ་ཀུན་དགེ་ལགས་སྐྱབ་པའི་ཐུགས་རྗེ་ཅན།
 བསམ་ཡས་ལྷན་ལས་མཛད་པའི་སྟོབས་མངའ་བ།
 འཇམ་མགོན་ལྷ་མའི་འབས་ལ་མགོས་ལྷག་འཚམ།

ཚེས་རྗེ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མཛད་པའི་རིགས་གཏེར་རང་འབྲེལ་གྱི་མཚོད་བརྗོད་ལས་བྱུང་།

ཚེས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་པོ་འགྲོ་བ་དུ་མའི་མགོན།
 གདུལ་བྱའི་དོན་དུ་དཔལ་ལྷན་ས་སྐྱ་ཅ།
 རྒྱ་མོ་དགེ་བྱེད་དཔྱིད་ཟླ་ར་བ་ཡི།
 ཉི་ཤུ་དུག་ལ་བཏུམས་པ་ནས་བཟུང་ཉེ།

རྒྱལ་པའི་གནས་སུ་ལྷགས་པའི་སྐྱམ་པོ་ཡི།
 བསུ་བཞིའི་ཚོ་རངས་ཞི་བར་གཤེགས་ཀྱི་བར།
 རབ་དུ་རྡོ་མཚར་རྣམ་ཐར་དཔག་མེད་རྣམས།
 མདོར་བཟུས་འཚད་ལ་གྲུབ་པས་མཉམ་པར་གྱིས།

བྱང་རྒྱབ་སེམས་ཀྱི་སྤྲ་དབང་སྤྱི་བོའི་སྟེང་།
 ཡོན་ཏན་དཔག་མེད་རེན་ཆེན་རྒྱན་གྱིས་མཛེས།
 ཤེས་རབ་ཟག་མེད་ཡུམ་གྱི་རྒྱ་མཚོར་ཞུགས།
 དབང་འབྱོར་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚམ་ལོ།

བཏུམས་པའི་དུས་ན་འོད་གྲིས་འཇིག་རྟེན་ལྷབ། །
 ཡུམ་ལ་མ་གཞོད་བའི་བའི་རྣམ་པ་རྒྱས། །
 མཁའ་འགྲོའི་དབང་པོ་དཔག་ཡས་མཁའ་ལ་འདུས། །
 མི་མཚེག་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

ཚོས་ཀྱི་མ་མོ་མ་བསྐབས་ཁོང་དུ་རྒྱད། །
 གཞོན་ལུའི་དུས་ན་ཡོན་ཏན་ཐམས་ཅད་རྫོགས། །
 མཁའ་པ་དུ་མས་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་དབྱས་སྤྱི་བོ་སྟོན། །
 རྫོ་ཐུན་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

མི་ནས་མིར་གྱུར་སྤྱི་བོ་ཉེ་ལྷན་ལྷན། །
 འཇམ་པའི་དབྱངས་ཀྱིས་རྒྱུ་སྤྱི་བོ་བྱུང་པས། །
 བཟོ་དང་གསོ་བ་རྣམས་ཚད་ནང་དོན་རིག། །
 མཚུངས་བལ་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

མིང་པ་ཀུན་ཏུ་ལེགས་པར་རྒྱུངས་པས་ན། །
 མི་ལམ་ན་ཡང་ཚོས་ཀྱི་རྫོ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ན། །
 དགོ་བའི་བཤེས་ཀྱིས་དངོས་སྤྱི་བོ་གདམས་པར་མཛད། །
 རྣམ་དག་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

ཟབ་མའི་ལམ་ཀྱི་བྱིན་གྱིས་བསྐབས་པའི་ཚེ། །
 རྫོ་བཟོན་ལྷ་མ་འཇམ་པའི་དབྱངས་སྤྱི་བོ་གཟིགས། །
 རྫོ་བཟོན་གཞིག་ལ་ཚོས་རྣམས་ལྷགས་སྤྱི་བོ་རྒྱད། །
 ལྷགས་ཤོལ་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

ཐབས་ཀྱི་ལམ་གྱིས་འབྱུང་བའི་རབ་ཏུ་རྒྱུངས། །
 དག་གི་བསྐྱེས་པས་ཁོ་རྒྱལ་དངོས་སྤྱི་བོ་གཟིགས། །
 ལྷ་མའི་དྲིན་གྱིས་རྟོགས་པ་མཚེག་ཏུ་གྱུར། །
 རྫོན་ཐལ་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

རྟོག་གི་ངན་པའི་ཚོལ་བ་ཐམས་ཅད་བསྐོག།
སྐྱམས་པས་ཁེངས་པའི་རྟོག་གི་ཟེལ་གྱིས་གཞོན།།
མཁས་པའི་གཤམ་པས་ས་སྐྱེད་ཐམས་ཅད་ལྷབ།།
འཇིགས་བསམ་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ།།

ཡོངས་སུ་འཛིན་པའི་རྟོག་པ་ཀུན་ཏུ་སྤོང།།
ཚོས་གྱི་སྐྱེན་པ་རྟོག་ཏུ་རྣལ་པར་གཏོང།།
གཞན་གྱི་དོན་ལ་བསྐྱེལ་བ་མི་མངའ་བའི།།
བརྗེ་ལྡན་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ།།

གདུལ་བུའི་དོན་དུ་སྦྱང་བའི་ཚུལ་བསྟན་ཚེ།།
འཇམ་པའི་དབྱངས་དང་བྱམས་མགོན་སྐོ་ལྡན་དང་།།
ཞི་བ་ལྷ་དང་འཕགས་པ་སྤྲུལ་བ་གྱིས།།
བསྦྱང་གསོལ་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ།།

བསམ་པ་དག་པའི་གདུལ་བུ་འགའ་ཞིག་གིས།།
འཇམ་པའི་དབྱངས་སུ་མིག་གིས་མཛོང་གྱུར་ཅིང་།།
འཕགས་པའི་ཡུལ་ན་འང་གཏམ་དུ་དེ་ལྟར་གཤམ།།
རྣམ་ཐུབ་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ།།

ཤིང་མོ་སྤུལ་གྱི་དབྱར་རྩ་འབྲིང་པོ་དང་།།
ལྷགས་པོ་ཁྱི་ཡི་སྟོན་རྩ་ཐ་ཆུང་ཚེ།།
ལྷགས་མོ་ཕག་ལ་གཞན་དོན་འགོ་ཞེས་གསུངས།།
དུས་མཐུན་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ།།

མིག་འཕྲལ་ལྷ་བུའི་ཉིང་འཛིན་ལ་གནས་ནས།།
བསྦྱང་མི་མངའ་ཡང་གདུལ་བུ་འགའ་ཞིག་གི།།
སྐྱོབ་པ་སྦྱང་གྱུར་བསྦྱང་བའི་ཚུལ་བསྟན་པའི།།
བསམ་པས་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ།།

ལེ་ལོ་ཅན་རྣམས་བརྗོན་པ་བསྐྱེད་པ་དང་། །
སྐལ་དམན་རྣམས་ལ་དགེ་བ་སྤེལ་བའི་ཕྱིར། །
སྐྱུ་ཚེའི་འདུ་བྱེད་ཡང་ཡང་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརྒྱབས། །
མངའ་བརྟེན་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

གཞན་དོན་གཤེགས་པ་ཐུགས་ལ་འབྲུངས་པའི་ཚེ། །
སེམས་མེད་ས་ཡང་རྣམ་པ་དྲུག་ཏུ་གཡོས། །
བྱ་རྣམས་ཀུན་ཀྱང་ཅ་ཚོ་དུ་མ་སྤྲོགས། །
བྱམས་ཚེན་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་སྐྱབ་པའི་ཚོ་ག་མཛད་པའི་ཚེ། །
ལྷ་མ་རྣམས་དང་ཀྱེ་ཡི་དོ་རྗེ་ཡི། །
དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་ལྷ་རྣམས་མངོན་སུམ་གཤེགས་པར་གྱུར། །
དབང་ཐུན་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་ཀྱི་ཕྱག་གིས་དབུ་ལ་བྱུགས། །
རྗེ་བཙུན་སྤོལ་མ་ནམ་མཁའི་མཐོངས་སུ་བྱོན། །
འཇམ་དབྱངས་མགོན་པོ་ཡང་དང་ཡང་དུ་གཟིགས། །
བྱ་མཚོག་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

སྐྱུ་དབྱངས་མི་ཟད་སྤྲོགས་པའི་རྒྱལ་པོ་དང་། །
ཤུག་སེལ་ལྷོ་བ་མར་བཅས་པ་སོགས། །
སྐུ་པའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་དུ་མ་ཡང་ཡང་གཟིགས། །
མི་ཕུལ་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

རྗེ་བཙུན་མཐུ་སྟོབས་ནག་པོའི་ཞལ་ཐ་ནས། །
ཁྱོད་ནི་ཉི་མ་རྒྱལ་པོའི་བྱར་གྱུར་ཚོ། །
དྲི་མ་མེད་དཔལ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཉིད་འགྱུར་ཞེས། །
ལུང་བསྟན་ཁྱོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

གསང་བའི་གནས་ནི་ལྷ་བས་མི་མངོན་ཞིང་། །
དབུ་ཡི་གུལ་ཏྲོར་མཚོག་ཏུ་གསལ་པོར་འཕགས། །
མིན་མཚམས་མཛོད་སྤུ་ལ་བ་དུང་ལྷར་འབྱེལ། །
མཚན་ལྡན་ཁྲོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

རོལ་མའི་སྤྱ་རྒྱལ་མཁའ་ལས་ཡང་ཡང་གྲགས། །
འཇའ་འོད་རྣམ་པའི་གདུགས་དང་བ་དན་འཕྱར། །
ལྷ་རྒྱལ་ཤུགས་ཀྱིས་ས་ཡང་རབ་ཏུ་གཡོས། །
ཉེར་ཞི་ཁྲོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

བྱམས་པའི་སྣོད་ཀྱིས་སྤྱོད་དཔག་མེད་འདུས། །
ལྷ་མའི་མཚོད་པ་ཕུལ་དུ་བྱུང་བ་བརྟེས། །
སྤྱོད་གདུང་རིང་བསྐྱེལ་དང་ལྡན་ཉེན་དུ་བཞག །
ཕན་དགོངས་ཁྲོད་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

སྤྱི་བ་སྤྱི་བ་རྒྱལ་སྤུ་ཡང་དང་ཡང་། །
མཁས་པ་མཁས་པའི་ཚོགས་ལ་ཕྱོན་སྦྱངས་པས། །
ཚོ་འདྲར་ལན་རེ་རྒྱང་རེ་ཐོས་ཚམ་གྱིས། །
གཞུང་ལྷགས་ཀྱན་ཤེས་ཀྱན་དགའ་རྒྱལ་མཚན་དཔལ། །
བཟང་པོའི་ཞབས་ལ་སྤྱི་བོས་ཕྱག་འཚལ་ལོ། །

དཔལ་ལྡན་ས་སྤྱོད་ཉ་ཚེན་པོའི་རྣམ་པར་ཐར་བ་མདོར་བསྐྱས་ཏེ། རིགས་པར་སྤྱོད་པ་ཡར་སྤྱངས་
བ་ཡིས་སྦྱར། རྒྱས་པ་རྣམ་ཐར་གྱི་ཡི་གེ་ཚེན་མོར་བརྟ་བར་བྱའོ། །

Hymn to Dharma Lord Sakya Paṇḍita

Yarlungpa Sengé Gyaltzen

Your wide eyes perceive all that can be known.
Through your compassion, all beings are brought to excellence.
You wield the power to effect inconceivable buddha activity.
I bow my head in reverence at the feet of my guru, Mañjunātha.

*The foregoing stanza was extracted from the introductory
homage found in the Dharma lord's auto-commentary on his
Treasury of Valid Reasoning^[1].*

For the sake of those to be tamed, the king of Dharma
And protector of multitudes of beings took birth
At glorious Sakya on the twenty-sixth day
Of the first month of spring in the Male Water Tiger year^[2].

From then until his passing into peace at Magically
Conjured Temple^[3]
At dawn on the fourteenth day of Mārگاśīrṣa^[4] in the Iron
Pig year^[5],

The innumerable events of his astonishing spiritual career unfolded.

These I will here recount in brief—listen with respect!

Bodhisattva lord of nāgas, your crown adorned
With bejeweled ornaments of unfathomable qualities,
You entered the vast waters of your mother in her undefiled
wisdom.

I bow my crown in reverence to you, the sovereign one.

At the time of your birth, the world was filled with light.
Unharmful, your mother was suffused with an experience of
bliss.

Countless powerful ḍākinīs gathered in the sky.

I bow my crown in reverence to you, the greatest of humans.

Without study, you assimilated the phenomenology of Dharma.
In your youth, your qualities were already perfectly complete.
Many scholars acclaimed you in public gatherings.

I bow my crown in reverence to you, the savant.

Throughout twenty-five consecutive lives as a human,
You remained under the compassionate care of Mañjuḥoṣa,

Mastering the arts, medicine, Sanskrit grammar, logic, and
Buddhist doctrine.

I bow my crown in reverence to you, the peerless one.

Owing to excellent training throughout all your existences,
Even in your dreams, spiritual friends imparted
Actual instruction on the full range of Dharma gateways.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, the immaculate one.

While under the transformative power of the profound path,
You saw your venerable lord guru as Mañjughoṣa.
In a single instant, you assimilated all Dharmas.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, whose mind was liberated.

On the path of means, you utterly purified the four elements.
Through vocal recitation, you beheld in actuality Krodhārāja.
Owing to your guru's kindness, your realization was consummate.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, the flawless one.

You refuted every challenge from the treacherous sophists
And overpowered them in their presumptuous arrogance.
Your renown as a scholar spread across the entire earth.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, the fearless one.

You totally renounced acquisitiveness
And ever unstintingly gave the gift of Dharma,
Never failing to remember the welfare of others.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, the loving one.

When you feigned illness for the benefit of your disciples,
Mañjuḥoṣa, sagacious Maitreyaṇātha,
Śāntideva, and the noble Nāgārjuna
All offered you solace. I bow my crown in reverence to you.

Some of your disciples who had pure intent
Beheld you with their own eyes as being Mañjuḥoṣa.
You became renowned as such even in the land of noble beings.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, the spontaneously perfect one.

In the middle month of summer in the Female Wood Snake year^[6],
And again in the last month of autumn in the Male Iron
Dog year^[7],
You declared that in the Female Iron Pig year^[8] you would
depart for others' benefit.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, foreseer of your own
passing.

Abiding in illusion-like meditative absorption,
You outwardly feigned illness—even as you had none—
In order to purify the obscurations of some of your disciples.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, the inconceivable one.

In order to inspire diligence in those who were indolent
And promote the virtue of those lacking in good fortune,
You repeatedly employed sustaining power over your
own life span.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, who attained mastery.

When it occurred to you to depart this life for others' benefit,
The earth, though insentient, trembled six times
And birds of all kinds chattered profusely.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, the immensely kind one.

While performing a ritual for maṇḍala accomplishment,
You beheld in actuality all the gurus
As well as all the deities of the Hevajra maṇḍala.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, the powerful one.

Avalokiteśvara caressed your head with his hand.
Venerable Lady Tārā came to you from the vault of the sky.
Frequently you had visionary encounters with Lord Mañjuḥṣa.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, the best of all beings.

Repeatedly you beheld many emanated maṇḍalas
Such as those of Bhīṣmagarjitanirghoṣasvararāja
And Śākyasiṃha with his retinue of disciples.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, the consummate human.

The venerable lord^[9], the Lord of Might^[10], and Kṛṣṇacārin
together foretold
That when you become the son of the solar king^[11],
You will attain buddhahood as Vimalaśrī.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, whose awakening was
thus prophesied.

Your male organ was invisible;
Your crown protrusion, sublimely prominent.
Between your brows, a hair-treasure, white as snow, was coiled
like a conch.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, endowed with the marks
of perfection.

The sound of music in the sky was heard again and again.
Banners and parasols of rainbow light appeared.
Even the earth trembled with the might of the gods.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, who came to rest in repose.

Countless beings gathered through the power of your love.
You were lavishly worshiped by gods and humans alike.
You left relics among your remains as supports for those with faith.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, the altruistic one.

In life after life, again and again,
You had already developed prodigious erudition as a scholar
Such that, in this life, you knew all the scriptural systems
By simply hearing them just once or twice: Venerable
Kunga Gyaltzen Palsangpo, I bow my crown in reverence to you.

*This brief recounting of the spiritual career of the illustrious
master Sakya Paṇḍita was composed by the logician Yarlungpa.
For more extensive accounts, the great hagiographies should be
consulted.*



Sakya Paṇḍita Kunga Gyaltsen Palsangpo

A Brief Hagiography of Sakya Paṇḍita

As you all know, this is a very auspicious day: the holy anniversary of the great Sakya Paṇḍita Kunga Gyaltsen Palsangpo. Today, I will be presenting a brief account of Sakya Paṇḍita’s hagiography. Sakya Paṇḍita was in reality a buddha—he was an omniscient being. His spiritual career was as limitless as the sky, so it would be impossible for me to describe it in full detail. I will try to explain just a small portion of his noble life and activities.

There are many ways to do this according to different outlines and texts. I will take the text of a liturgical hymn of praise to Sakya Paṇḍita^[12], which we recite during ritual practices, as the basis for this teaching.

Before beginning, I would like to say that the great Ārya Mañjuśrī is the embodiment of the wisdom of all buddhas. In the sūtras, it says that reciting his name respectfully is even more meritorious than reciting the Buddha’s name. This is because

Mañjuśrī helped many buddhas to generate *bodhicitta*, when they first entered the Mahāyāna path; he then helped them to practice the path and attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. In this way, he is like the father of all past buddhas. For that reason, there is great merit in simply hearing the name of Mañjuśrī. Today, I am giving a talk about Sakya Paṇḍita, who was Mañjuśrī himself—a real manifestation of Mañjuśrī in the form of a human being.

The first verse of the liturgy reads:

Your wide eyes perceive all that can be known.

Through your compassion, all beings are brought to excellence.

You wield the power to effect inconceivable buddha activity.

I bow my head in reverence at the feet of my guru, Mañjunātha.

This verse was in fact originally written by Sakya Paṇḍita himself in his *Treasury of Valid Reasoning*^[13], a treatise on logic, to pay homage to his root guru, Jetsun Rinpoche Drakpa Gyaltzen (who was also his uncle). Later, Drakpa Gyaltzen offered the same words of praise back to him, and so the verse came to be known as a hymn to Sakya Paṇḍita. The verse indicates that Sakya Paṇḍita had perfect knowledge, compassion, and power. His perfect knowledge was the same as that of Mañjuśrī, his perfect compassion was the

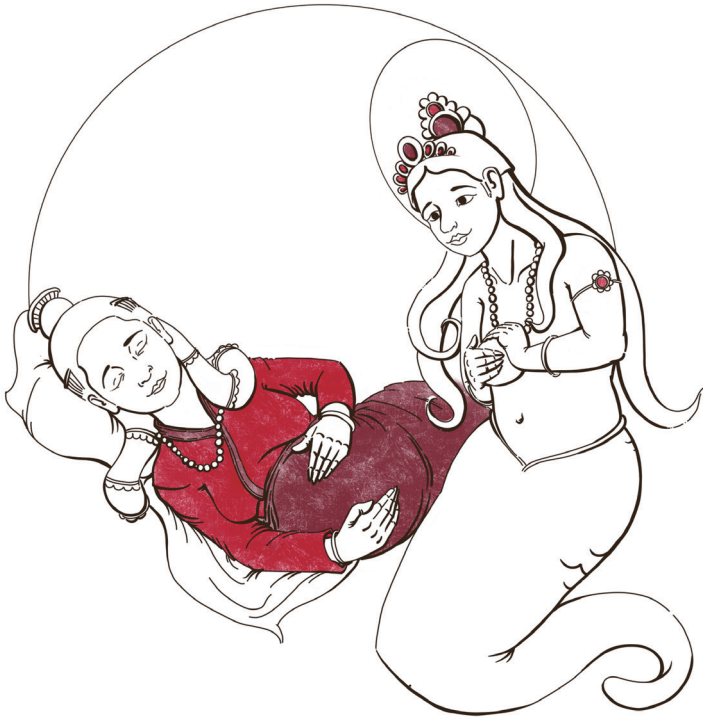
same as that of Avalokiteśvara, and his perfect power was the same as that of Vajrapāṇi.

After this verse of homage comes the main text of the hymn. Beginning with the words “For the sake of those to be tamed, the king of Dharma,” the first two verses make up the promise to compose the text, in which the author states that he will write about Sakya Paṇḍita’s life, from his birth to his *mahāparinirvāṇa* (“great final transcendence”). What then follows is the body of the hymn, which outlines Sakya Paṇḍita’s spiritual career, beginning with the words “Bodhisattva lord of nāgas, your crown adorned.” It comprises twenty-two points.

The first point is Sakya Paṇḍita’s entry into his mother’s womb. The great founding master of the Sakya tradition was Lama Sakyapa Kunga Nyingpo. Of his four sons, the fourth was named Palchen Öpo. Sachen Kunga Nyingpo’s consort was Jocham Ödrön; Palchen Öpo’s consort was Nyitri Cham.

One night, Nyitri Cham had a dream in which she saw a nāga king bearing many auspicious signs and precious jewels on his head. In her dream, the nāga king entered her. This is how the great Sakya Paṇḍita entered his mother’s womb. The account is similar to the way Prince Siddhārtha entered Queen Māyādevī’s

womb in the form of a white elephant with six tusks. Here, Sakya Paṇḍita entered his mother's womb in the form of a nāga king, with numerous auspicious signs and precious jewels crowning his head.



Auspicious Birth of Greatness

The second point concerns his amazing birth with auspicious signs of greatness. Sakya Paṇḍita was born on the twenty-sixth day of the first lunar month. There were many auspicious signs at the time of his birth. We can divide these into outer, inner, and secret signs. The outer sign was light that radiated throughout the sky and the entire universe. This signified that his noble activities would permeate all directions.

The inner sign was that his mother felt no pain during childbirth. In fact, she felt great joy. This demonstrated the total absence of even a single negative thought: Sakya Paṇḍita's wisdom was ever unstained by faults and obscurations.

The secret sign was a gathering of ḍākinīs in the sky, bearing limitless offerings in veneration. This indicated that Ārya Mañjuśrī had taken birth in the form of a human being.

Accompanied by these outer, inner, and secret signs, Sakya Paṇḍita was born, showing all the indications of a noble being even at the time of his birth.



A Child of Extraordinary Qualities and Conduct

The third point is that Sakya Paṇḍita’s behavior or conduct was beyond that of an ordinary child. The verse describing this begins with the lines “Without study, you assimilated the phenomenology of Dharma. In your youth, your qualities were already perfectly complete.” Because of his imprints or propensities from previous lives, when he was less than one year

old he was able to write Sanskrit vowels and consonants in the earth without anyone teaching him the language. He did many other amazing things when he was only a few months old.

From his root guru, Jetsun Rinpoche Drakpa Gyaltsen, he received the *upāsaka* (male lay disciple) vows as well as the name “Kunga Gyaltsen.” In reality, Sakya Paṇḍita did not need teachers and did not need to study anything because he was Mañjuśrī—he was already omniscient. While he had no actual need to learn anything himself, he engaged in study for the benefit of ordinary people—those for whom he appeared as a human being—so as to encourage them to put effort into learning the Dharma. To that end, he studied many subjects: various languages, astrology, medicine, the arts, and others. He mastered each of these disciplines after receiving instruction from a teacher just once or twice, demonstrating that he was able to learn very quickly and with great ease.

From his father and many other masters, Sakya Paṇḍita received numerous empowerments and other profound teachings. He acquired all this knowledge at a very young age. Furthermore, he was praised not only by his own followers but also by many scholars of other Buddhist traditions. In public gatherings on numerous occasions, great scholars of all the major schools

declared that he was no ordinary human but rather a noble being, the actual manifestation of Mañjuśrī.

The fourth point is that Sakya Paṇḍita was “under the compassionate care of Mañjughoṣa,” which refers to his connection with Mañjuśrī. The teachings state that obtaining a precious human birth is difficult, this difficulty being described in terms of causes, numerical comparisons, analogies, and nature. Sakya Paṇḍita was an extraordinary being, born not only as a human but as a great spiritual master for his previous twenty-five lives. In these past lives, he had established karmic connections with his root guru, Jetsun Rinpoche Drakpa Gyaltsen. Both of them acknowledged that they shared strong connections, and we can understand both to be emanations of Mañjuśrī.

Sakya Paṇḍita became a great scholar—a *paṇḍita*. He was the first person in the snowy land of Tibet to acquire the Sanskrit title Mahāpaṇḍita (“Great Scholar”), which denotes someone who has mastered the five major and five minor sciences of Indian classical learning. In the text, the five major sciences are listed as “the arts, medicine, Sanskrit grammar, logic, and Buddhist doctrine.” Based on this list, we can infer that Sakya Paṇḍita also mastered all the minor sciences.

Sakya Paṇḍita was exceptionally skilled in the first of the major sciences, arts and crafts. For instance, he produced sacred paintings, one of which was a temple mural at Samyé Monastery in Tibet. This image, known in Tibetan as Domtsön Dampa^[14], depicted Ārya Mañjuśrī's symbolic attributes, and it had all the special qualities of a great painting. Sakya Paṇḍita was also a sculptor. At the main monastic seat of Sakya in Tibet, there are many holy and historic statues and Dharma books. One of the sacred statues of Mañjuśrī is called Jamyang Si Ö Barwa ("Mañjughoṣa Ablaze with Majestic Brilliance"). It was created by Sakya Paṇḍita, and we can still see this holy and blessed Mañjuśrī statue and receive blessings by doing so. It has all the special qualities of a great statue.

Sakya Paṇḍita mastered outer and inner astrology and composed texts on this subject. He mastered the second major science, the medical arts, and wrote treatises on medicine. As to the third major science, Sanskrit grammar, he composed many texts on linguistic subjects including grammar, poetics, prosody, and synonymics.

The fourth major science is logic. In India, the main treatises on Buddhist logic were written by the great ācāryas Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. Dignāga composed the *Compendium of Validity*^[15],

and Dharmakīrti composed the *Exposition of Validity*^[16] and six other treatises—seven works altogether. We refer to these eight texts, the one by Dignāga and the seven by Dharmakīrti, as the “seven sections of logic plus the source treatise.” These are the main Indian works on Buddhist logic that are studied by all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Sakya Paṇḍita received all these teachings and then composed his *Treasury of Valid Reasoning*, which encompasses the essence of these eight Indic source texts. He wrote the root text and then composed an auto-commentary on it. Today, we still study the *Treasury of Valid Reasoning* in all the Sakya *shedras* (institutes for advanced Buddhist studies), and it is also studied in other schools of Tibetan Buddhism. As you know, the Dharma came from India to Tibet, and vast numbers of texts were translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan. Sakya Paṇḍita’s *Treasury of Valid Reasoning* is a rare example of a Tibetan literary work that was translated into Sanskrit and studied in India.

The fifth major science is Buddhist philosophy. In this, Sakya Paṇḍita is the owner of the ocean of sūtric and tantric Dharma. He wrote many texts expounding the doctrines of both sūtra and tantra. For example, regarding sūtra, he composed *Elucidation of the Sage’s Intent*^[17] and *Analysis of the Three Vows*^[18]. For the benefit of people in the sphere of worldly life, there is his

Eloquence of Sakya^[19]. Sakya Paṇḍita composed many other texts on both sūtra and tantra.

Returning to the hymn's outline of Sakya Paṇḍita's spiritual career, the fifth point is that he received teachings in his dreams. When he was eighteen years of age, one night he dreamed that he met Ācārya Vasubandhu, a great Indian paṇḍita. In the dream, for one month he received teachings from Vasubandhu on his *Treasury of Phenomenology*^[20]. When he woke up, he had fully assimilated both the words and the meaning of the *Treasury of Phenomenology* in its entirety. Later, Paṇḍita Śākyaśrī expounded this same treatise to him, saying exactly the same things he had previously received in his dream.

From the perspective of ordinary people, even in his dreams Sakya Paṇḍita could receive precious and profound teachings from other great masters. As I said earlier, it was not necessary for him to rely on teachers and study because he was already omniscient. However, in the perception of ordinary people, he demonstrated amazing feats such as these. In his dreams, he met many masters and received many precious and profound teachings.



Sakya Paṇḍita Saw Jetsun Drakpa Gyaltsen as Mañjuśrī

The sixth point is mainly about the “profound path,” which refers to guru yoga. The text reads:

*While under the transformative power of the profound path,
You saw your venerable lord guru as Mañjughoṣa.
In a single instant, you assimilated all Dharmas.
I bow my crown in reverence to you, whose mind was liberated.*

The profound path of guru yoga blessing was like a gateway for Sakya Paṇḍita, leading him to gain realization of all Dharmas and disciplines. Both Sakya Paṇḍita and his root guru, Jetsun Rinpoche Drakpa Gyaltsen, were Ārya Mañjuśrī. For the perception of ordinary people, however, at one point Sakya Paṇḍita requested Drakpa Gyaltsen to bestow upon him a guru yoga blessing. Drakpa Gyaltsen, equally acting for the perception of ordinary people, pointed out that Sakya Paṇḍita perceived him as merely being his uncle (he was Sakya Paṇḍita's father's elder brother). Because Sakya Paṇḍita saw him as his uncle rather than as his guru, Drakpa Gyaltsen refused to confer the precious and profound guru yoga blessing.

Subsequently, Sakya Paṇḍita became very ill and almost died. At the same time, Drakpa Gyaltsen also displayed the appearance of sickness. While they were both ill, Sakya Paṇḍita served Drakpa Gyaltsen day and night, never thinking of food or sleep for himself. This course of action purified what little obscuration had remained up to that point, leaving Sakya Paṇḍita fully receptive. When Drakpa Gyaltsen finally bestowed the guru yoga blessing, Sakya Paṇḍita saw him as an actual buddha in the form of Mañjuśrī. In the perception of ordinary people, after receiving this blessing, he completely assimilated all the sūtric and tantric teachings as well as other disciplines, thus becoming an omniscient one.

The seventh point is Sakya Paṇḍita's excellence in accomplishing activities without effort. On the profound path, he purified the ordinary four elements (because this is a Vajrayāna subject, I will not go into detail here). Also, through mantra recitation, he had visionary encounters with many deities. The text mentions "you beheld in actuality Kroddharāja." Here, Kroddharāja ("Lord of Wrath") refers to the wrathful deity Acala. Furthermore, by means of pleasing his guru and preserving their *samaya* at all times, his body, speech, and mind became inseparable from those of his guru. This is how, without needing to make effort, he gained full realization and became a noble being.

The eighth point is that Sakya Paṇḍita defeated the arrogance of heretical scholars. His fame had spread everywhere, even beyond Tibet, and consequently some non-Buddhist Indian masters wanted to debate with him. They came to Tibet just for this purpose. The debate occurred in a place called Kyirong. There, through logical reasoning, Sakya Paṇḍita defeated all their positions and destroyed their arrogance.

The ninth point is that Sakya Paṇḍita performed activities to help others without any clinging thoughts, having completely abandoned concern for the eight worldly dharmas. Constantly teaching, he "ever unstintingly gave the gift of Dharma" to emperors, ministers, and ordinary beings—to everyone—so that



Sakya Paṇḍita Defeated the Arrogance of Heretical Scholars

the Buddhadharma would flourish. Even in old age, he was happy to benefit others and lead them from suffering and dissatisfaction to temporary and ultimate happiness, without concern for his own health and well-being.

The tenth point is that while Sakya Paṇḍita displayed the appearance of sickness for the perception of ordinary people, he



Sakya Paṇḍita's Selfless Compassion Beyond Attachment

encountered numerous divine beings. He saw in actuality Ārya Mañjuśrī, who had accepted him as his main deity for all future lives. He saw “sagacious Maitreyaṅgathā,” the future buddha Maitreya, who bestowed prophecies upon him. The hymn then mentions “Śāntideva, and the noble Nāgārjuna.” He met Ācārya Śāntideva, who spoke to him about the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, and other doctrinal points. He met Ārya

Nāgārjuna, who spoke to him about the four seals indicative of the Buddhist view. These principles are expressed as the following four statements:

All that is compounded is impermanent.

All that is defiled is imbued with suffering.

All phenomena are devoid of self.

Nirvāṇa is peace.

Nāgārjuna addressed these and other precious and profound teachings. Additionally, many Dharma protector gods requested that Sakya Paṇḍita recover from illness.

The eleventh point is about seeing Sakya Paṇḍita as being Ārya Mañjuśrī. Certain faithful disciples with the right motivation saw Sakya Paṇḍita as being Mañjuśrī in actuality. Moreover, in connection with this point, there is a story about Paṇḍita Śākyaśrībhadrā. At one point, while in India, the land of noble beings, he met an arhat. The arhat gave him a yellow lotus flower bud, which had not yet opened. He told Śākyaśrībhadrā, “When you go to Tibet, you will meet many emanations of Mañjuśrī. But when this yellow lotus bud blooms, you should give it to the emanation of Mañjuśrī that you meet then.” Later, when Śākyaśrībhadrā met Sakya Paṇḍita, the lotus flower blossomed right then, just as it was

prophesied to do, and so he offered it to him. Furthermore, at the holy site of Bodhgayā, Sakya Paṇḍita's name was found inscribed in a self-arisen manner on a door there. These signs show that he was a real emanation of Mañjuśrī. Some fortunate, faithful people—and noble beings—saw him as being Mañjuśrī in person.

The twelfth point concerns Sakya Paṇḍita's prophecy of his own passing. When he was sixty-three years of age, he announced that he would enter mahāparinirvāṇa in the Iron Pig year, several years later. Subsequently, in the year of Iron Dog—one year before he would enter mahāparinirvāṇa—he told others, “You should keep this cloth and use it to wrap my relics following the cremation.” These were some of the prophetic indications that he gave to his disciples and followers regarding his great final nirvāṇa.

The thirteenth point is that Sakya Paṇḍita displayed the appearance of sickness in order to purify others' mental continuums. Magicians can create many illusions. Similarly, at one point Sakya Paṇḍita remained in a magic-like samādhi or meditative state. In reality, however, he was already free from birth, sickness, aging, and death. It was for the perception of ordinary people, in order to purify disciples of their ignorance and lead them to practice Dharma, that he showed the outward appearance of illness.

The fourteenth point concerns Sakya Paṇḍita prolonging his own life. In the words of the hymn, “You employed sustaining power over your own life span.” For those who were too lazy to



Sakya Paṇḍita Manifested Illness to Purify Others' Minds

develop awareness of impermanence and realize that all phenomena are like water bubbles, and also to increase the virtue in the mental continuums of his disciples, he prolonged his life so that he could fulfill the activities I've already mentioned. Sakya Paṇḍita did this even though he was in fact beyond birth and death.

The fifteenth point is that external signs appeared when Sakya Paṇḍita had the wish to enter mahāparinirvāṇa. There was an earthquake and birds made unusual sounds. He always had the wish to benefit others, possessing unconditional and matchless love and compassion for all sentient beings without exception or discrimination. When such a great being has the wish to enter mahāparinirvāṇa, signs of this kind may manifest.

The sixteenth point concerns Sakya Paṇḍita seeing maṇḍala deities. During a *drupchö* (intensive sādhana ritual practice), for example, he saw in actuality the complete Śrī Hevajra nine-deity maṇḍala. Not only did he see the maṇḍala, within it he also received transmissions, including Mantrayāna vows, and generated realization.

The seventeenth point is that Sakya Paṇḍita encountered Avalokiteśvara and other deities in his pure vision. The text reads:

Avalokiteśvara caressed your head with his hand.

Venerable Lady Tārā came to you from the vault of the sky.

Frequently you had visionary encounters with Lord Mañjuḥṣa.

I bow my crown in reverence to you, the best of all beings.

Sakya Paṇḍita met the eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara, who caressed his head. He also saw Āryā Tārā, who spoke to him about liberation from saṃsāra. He encountered Ārya Mañjuśrī many times. These are some examples, among many others, of the purity of his vision.

The eighteenth point is about Sakya Paṇḍita's pure vision in seeing buddhas and other awakened beings. The text names Bhīṣmagarjitanirghoṣasvararāja, a tathāgata or buddha. Sakya Paṇḍita met this buddha in person and received many profound teachings from him. Also named here is Śākyasiṃha, or Śākyamuni. Sakya Paṇḍita encountered him with his retinue and many other maṇḍala figures.

The nineteenth point is the prophecy that Sakya Paṇḍita would become a buddha. The next verse in the hymn begins with "The venerable lord, the Lord of Might, and Kṛṣṇacārin together foretold." "Venerable lord" refers to Jetsun Rinpoche Drakpa Gyaltsen. "Lord of Might" refers to Mahāsiddha Virūpa, also known as the glorious Birwapa. Kṛṣṇacārin was another mahāsiddha. In

his visionary encounter, Sakya Paṇḍita saw Drakpa Gyaltsen in the center, flanked by Virūpa on his right and Kṛṣṇacārin on his left. Drakpa Gyaltsen told Sakya Paṇḍita, “In the future, you will become a buddha named Vimalaśrī.” Virūpa then confirmed this statement while Kṛṣṇacārin rejoiced and smiled. This is how Sakya Paṇḍita received prophecy of his future buddhahood.

The twentieth point is that Sakya Paṇḍita possessed the thirty-two major marks and eighty minor marks of a great being. Several of the major marks are mentioned in the next verse:

Your male organ was invisible;

Your crown protrusion, sublimely prominent.

*Between your brows, a hair-treasure, white as snow, was
coiled like a conch.*

*I bow my crown in reverence to you, endowed with the marks
of perfection.*

Implicitly, this passage indicates that he possessed all of the thirty-two major and eighty minor marks.



Sakya Paṇḍita Entered Mahāparinirvāṇa

The twenty-first point is Sakya Paṇḍita's entry into mahāparinirvāṇa. At a place in China called Wuwei, in the year of the Iron Pig (1251 ce), at the age of seventy (figuring according to Tibetan custom), he entered mahāparinirvāṇa. According to the Tibetan lunar calendar, this happened on the fourteenth day of the eleventh month (which is today), in the early morning. At that

time, there were sounds of great cymbals in the sky. Rainbow-colored light in the forms of offering objects, parasols, and banners appeared everywhere in the sky. There was an earthquake, and many *vīras* and *vīrās* appeared, showing their affection and respect. Seated in the full lotus posture, holding a vajra and bell crossed at his heart, Sakya Paṇḍita entered mahāparinirvāṇa.

The twenty-second point is that Sakya Paṇḍita left relics so that his followers would continue to receive his blessings in the future. After the cremation, many wondrous holy relics appeared among the physical remains. The relics were placed in statues and stūpas to serve as supports for followers to generate merit through prostrations and circumambulations. In that way, people continued to receive the benefit of Sakya Paṇḍita's blessings even after his passing.

Conclusion

Sakya Paṇḍita performed many amazing deeds, all for the sake of helping others and for the Buddhadharma. Among Tibetans, he was a matchless, excellent being who mastered the ten major and minor sciences and flourished in all of them. Thanks to Sakya Paṇḍita, we Tibetans acquired all of these disciplines intact,

and we still study and practice them. He was a great being who accomplished enlightened activity in great measure. If we can follow in his footsteps, learning from his advice and teachings, then we, too, will certainly achieve liberation and enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

With this, I conclude my short talk on Sakya Paṇḍita's hagiography. In closing, I make this wish for you: May the blessings of our root gurus and the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha be with you now and always. Let us dedicate all our merit to attaining buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. In particular, let us sincerely dedicate our merit to the long life and good health of our root guru and pray that he turns the wheel of Dharma far and wide.

I would also like to make a personal wish for my eldest daughter, Jetsunma. She was born on the anniversary day of Sakya Paṇḍita, so today is her birthday. I wish her good health and a long life.

Notes

- [1] प्रमाणयुक्तनिधि *Pramāṇayuktanidhi*, *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter*.
- [2] 1182 ce.
- [3] In Liangzhou (present-day Wuwei, Gansu Province, People's Republic of China).
- [4] The eleventh month of the Tibetan lunar calendar.
- [5] 1251.
- [6] 1245.
- [7] 1250.
- [8] 1251.
- [9] Jetsun Drakpa Gyaltsen (Rje btsun Grags pa rgyal mtshan, 1147–1216).
- [10] Thutop Wangchuk (Mthu stobs dbang phyug), an epithet for Virūpa (dates unknown).
- [11] King Nyimai Topphe (Nyi ma'i stobs 'phel, "Rising Strength of the Sun").
- [12] Yarlungpa Sengé Gyaltsen (Yar klungs pa Seng ge rgyal mtshan, fl. fourteenth century), Hymn to Dharma Lord Sakya Paṇḍita (Chos rje sa paṅ la bstod pa).
- [13] Skt. *Pramāṇayuktanidhi*, Tib. *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter*.

- [14] Sdom brtson dam pa (“sublime one, assiduous in your discipline”). The name of the mural is derived from the opening words of the verses of praise Sakya Paṇḍita painted on the wall beneath the main image at Samyé Monastery.
- [15] *Pramāṇasamuccaya*.
- [16] *Pramāṇavārttika*.
- [17] *Thub pa’i dgongs gsal*.
- [18] *Sdom gsum rab dbye*.
- [19] *Sa skya’i legs bshad*.
- [20] *Abhidharmakośa*.



- 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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