



Advice Before the Maitreya Initiation

His Holiness the 43rd Sakya Trizin, Gyana Vajra Rinpoche



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Editorial Preface

Buddhadharma speaks of wisdom, yet wisdom is neither acquired from books nor found externally. It is inherently present, merely awaiting discovery. Like a treasure buried deep underground, only through personal effort can its brilliance be revealed. Searching in the wrong direction is like searching tirelessly in a place where no jewel exists—no amount of wandering will yield results. But if one knows where to look and proceeds with steady steps, its radiance will eventually emerge.

What, then, is the right direction? Through proper listening and study of the Dharma, right contemplation, and meditative practice, we are gradually led to uncover the wellspring of inner wisdom.

In this teaching, His Holiness the 43rd Sakya Trizin illuminates the right path, revealing the root cause that obscures one's wisdom and guiding us in the integration of listening, contemplation, and meditation. By turning inward, we awaken to the wisdom we already possess. May these words serve as a beacon for us all, helping us find clarity and return to our true nature.

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Introduction

In Buddhism, we speak of “dark” and “light” aeons. Dark aeons are those in which no buddhas appear to teach the Dharma, and light aeons are those in which one or more buddhas appear. Our present aeon is a light or a fortunate aeon. It is said that there will be one thousand buddhas teaching the Dharma in this aeon. Buddha Shakyamuni was the fourth, and the fifth, who has not yet appeared, is named Maitreya Buddha.

I was asked to give the bodhisattva vow before we begin the initiation, and I’m going to do that in a short form.

Combining the Four Truths and the Two Truths

Before we begin, I want to say that what I am teaching today is my understanding of the Dharma; I’m not saying that this is the absolutely right and only way. I simply want to tell you what I have understood. According to my limited understanding

the teachings, I think it is important to reflect on why we are entering the Buddhist path before we begin the journey or enter the path of Dharma. I think that one of the biggest mistakes practitioners make is starting the Buddhist path without really knowing why it is important or where it leads. The reason for following this path is to get rid of our suffering. We should understand that when we talk about getting rid of suffering, we are talking about the mind. Everything is mind, and physically nothing really exists.

The Buddha's first teaching after he became enlightened was given at Deer Park near Varanasi: the teaching on the four noble truths. These truths can be expressed in a shorter form called the two truths: relative and ultimate truth. Relative truth is what we ordinarily experience as real, as good and bad, and so on. There is a common saying that "seeing is believing." In Buddhism, however, we understand that what we see with our ordinary perception is not the ultimate truth. The Buddhist path is about attaining realization of ultimate truth by purifying the mind. If we jump into practice without understanding the reasons why, we will not make much progress.

Buddhism has the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, or the Pali and Sanskrit traditions. Both are equally important and beneficial, but they are slightly different. The Mahāyāna, in turn, is divided

into the Pāramitāyāna and the Vajrayāna. In the Vajrayāna, we receive initiations and instructions, and then we practice sādhanas. Maybe you know, this, but if you haven't really understood the path, the results will not manifest. Maybe you are doing a Vajrapāṇi retreat and reciting one million mantras, or Vajrakīlāya retreat with 1.6 million mantras, or Hevajra, or some other Vajrayāna retreat. You might spend two, three, six, or twelve months doing practice, depending on how fast you're going. When you finish, you might think, "I've done everything according to the text. I've done all the mantras, and I've performed all the rituals. So why am I not seeing any results?" This is a common question. We have to understand that chanting the mantras, prayers, sādhanas, and rituals are not meant to be only external practices. All the rituals and other practices that we do are primarily internal, or in the mind. The practices of the body and voice—recitations and so on—are meant to help us perform the mental part.

We perform the external practices to generate internal experiences. I don't know if this is a good example, but think of someone who is afraid and keeps repeating, "I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid." They do this in order to be brave. It is a way of reminding yourself. The sādhanas we practice are something like this. The point of chanting mantras, doing rituals, or reciting texts is so that we can visualize, feel, and experience

something. Another example: When we watch movies, we see scenes that were actually acted and recorded years ago. As we watch them, however, we experience real emotions—laughter or tears. This happens even though the movie scene isn't really occurring. You are focused on a sort of reenactment, as the film plays back a recording. Our rituals and sādhanas are something like this. They allow us to reenact the experiences of our masters, our lineage gurus. The texts explain this experience. Through the sādhanas, we are trying to experience what they experienced and gain the same blessings.

Coming back to my first point—which is that we join the path because we want to get rid of suffering—I think it's helpful to examine the words we use. We say that we want to *get rid of suffering*, and we also say that we want to *attain enlightenment*. To attain enlightenment suggests that we are getting something or going somewhere other than here. But in the actual teachings, we are not gaining anything new or learning anything new with enlightenment. We are only realizing what we already have. We are already pure, inwardly; our minds are already enlightened. Reaching buddhahood is like bringing a seed to fruition. The seed of buddhahood is already present, and it will grow with the right conditions. All sentient beings possess this seed—not only Buddhists, not only humans, but all sentient beings in every realm, from the hell realm up to the god

realm. The teachings also say that, although we can all become enlightened, humans have the best chance for it.

Attaining enlightenment means understanding that this life and everything that we see is an illusion. When meeting all the things that we experience, many people have already decided what is good or bad or mediocre, and in this way, everything is set in their lives with rules to follow. But if we want to understand the highest level of the Buddhist teachings, we have to let go of these judgments and rules. Otherwise, we will not be able to see, understand, and experience relative truth and ultimate truth.

To Be Free from the Law of Saṃsāra

Maybe we understand this a little bit. But to fully experience it, we have to rise above the ordinary rules of human society and saṃsāra. You cannot follow the rules of football if you want to play basketball, or there will be confusion. We ordinarily accept certain realities as they appear to regular minds in saṃsāra: the existence of this building or house, you, me, him, or her. But what we are trying to see or experience is beyond ordinary perception and experience, and so it is very difficult. This is why I believe that if you really want to seek the truth and grasp it, you have to be very brave. You will need to have a much wider and deeper view of things than the ordinary view bound by saṃsāric law. Unless you are willing to be very courageous, it will be difficult to achieve real understanding of the truth.

We have been seeing according to this law of saṃsāra for so long that that we think this is the only law. In order to go beyond it, the first thing to do is to seek the truth, and the

second is to understand the truth. The third and most difficult is to accept the truth, really digest it. This generally takes the longest of the three, although the time required isn't necessarily the same for everyone. It is entirely according to one's own ability. But certainly, the final step—accepting the truth—is the most difficult. According to my understanding of the Dharma, once you do this, then you have reached enlightenment.

“Rangzhen is You and Me”

I will tell you a simple story to illustrate this. When I was young, maybe seven or eight, my late teacher Gen Sangpo said to me, “Today I’m going to test your ability to understand the words.” He told me to tell him the meaning of “rangzhen.” Well, “rang” means self, and “zhen” means other. Let me tell you, it took me many years—decades, really—to fully grasp the significance of this test. We often approach our religious texts as if they were almost magical, only talking about very extraordinary and secret things with a deep meaning beyond our power of comprehension. There were two or three other students with me, and we were all trying hard to understand the meaning of “rangzhen.” You need to understand that written Classical Tibetan and the modern spoken language are almost two different languages. In today’s world, it would be like the

difference between modern English and Shakespearean English. Nobody speaks Shakespearean English. It's a different and flowery language.

So there we were, trying to understand the word “rangzhen” and having a discussion about it. We kept repeating “rang” and “zhen.” Finally, we grew tired of looking for its deep meaning, and we asked, “Does it mean *you and me*?” And he said “Yeah, it means *you and me*.” It's such a simple thing. We think it must mean something very magical and complex in Classical Tibetan. But Buddhist teachings are actually simple and straightforward, as this example shows. I think that of all the major religions and world philosophies, Buddhism is the easiest to understand. The Buddha is just telling us what is and how it is that it is. The Buddha is not telling us anything other than the real nature of ordinary existence. There's nothing more to it than that—and nothing less. This is what we mean when we talk about the two truths, ultimate and relative truth.

We Create Our Own Obstacles

If you look carefully at the Buddha's life, you will not find that he performed many miracles. There are a few, yes, because sometimes they're needed for people like us. Seeing something

extraordinary can encourage us to become followers. However, the Buddha's teachings are simple. He gave examples. However, I would not say that he was a very talkative person, generally speaking; he was a simple person who did not speak much. When he spoke, he did it in such a way that a single word could explain a whole book—even his smile could convey profound teachings. There are many texts that tell us that the way he looked at people or smiled could give more understanding to many thousands of people than others could teach through many years of explanation. We are the one who make it complicated because we want to see something magical. We think it must be so. But we are only creating obstacles to our understanding of the Buddha's teachings, just as we create our own suffering.

We invite the stress and suffering that we experience. Suppose someone calls you a bad name—says that you are a dog or a chicken. Unless and until you react to it, that is that. The problem only starts when you react to what they say with anger, by getting emotional or stressed, or thinking “Oh, people don't like me.” Most of the problems we have in life are imaginary. We create imaginary situations or narratives, and then we have stress. All we need to do is accept the truth. If it is not the case that you are a chicken, then somebody calling you a chicken won't change that. It would be terrible if someone calling you a

chicken turned you into a chicken, but no one has ever turned into a chicken that way.

I always try to explain that when we react to such things, we are giving them more importance than they deserve. We are making matters worse. Even more, why do we accept that something is an “insult?” Somebody calls you one name or another, or says something or other. But an “insult” only becomes an insult when we accept the premise of the other person: “Oh, he is insulting me.” If you just leave it, then it is not an insult. What matters is what you think and feel, not what the other person thinks, which is something we cannot fix.

Another example I like to give is our own families. Whenever you go with your family to a shopping mall, the children will want to go somewhere, the father will want to go somewhere else, and the mother will want to go to yet another place. Everyone will want to go somewhere according to their own desires and taste. If everyone goes separately, that’s that. But if you think that everyone has to stay together, then somebody will need to adapt, whether it’s the father, mother, or the children. Even within our own families—to say nothing of other people—we all have different ways of thinking and looking at things.

My advice to you when you do your practice is to keep it simple. The easier it is for you, the better, because you will be able to practice for much longer periods of time. If you approach these texts mixed with ordinary reality or the so-called samsaric law, then it becomes difficult. These things will seem very difficult for an ordinary human being to digest. That's why I always say to keep it simple.

Accepting Another Truth

The secret ingredient is acceptance. We all want something. In this room of a few people, in this big world, everybody wants something. What we typically want is happiness, or a long life, or a good family, and things like this. We rarely pause to reflect on it. What is happiness, really? Usually, although we know that we want happiness, our questions stop there. But if you go deeper and ask about what happiness really is, you will find that it is very difficult to identify happiness. In fact, we are not even typically able to identify what is suffering. We want happiness and not suffering, but we don't even know what these things are. That's why the Buddha said that all of our samsaric experiences are illusions.

This is what gives me confidence that we can achieve enlightenment: The foundation of our ordinary existence is a weak foundation because we are controlled by our emotions. We are slaves to our emotions. Ordinary existence is like a house of cards, or a house with a weak foundation. It can be blown away just like that, just by asking these simple questions: What is suffering? What is happiness? Maybe we know enough about Buddhism to answer, “Oh suffering is because the result of our desire, our anger...” But then you must go on to ask one more question: what is anger? In ultimate reality, you cannot find anger. You cannot find desire. You cannot find ignorance. And then you must ask, why do they affect us so much in our lives? Because this foundation of suffering is such a weak foundation, I am inspired to believe that we really can achieve enlightenment—and not just us, but all sentient beings.

I think that everyone here has received Dharma teachings before, both those in this room and those receiving the initiation online. We all know that we are in saṃsāra, and that we are in saṃsāra because of anger, desire, and ignorance. But if we all know this, then why are we not enlightened? What are we waiting for? This is where things get tough. It is because we are so accustomed to this ordinary view and to following the rules of saṃsāra. We have been doing this for so long—for many years, for many lifetimes—because we are accustomed to

it. It is extremely difficult for us to now accept another reality. Saṃsāra is the reality for us because we have been accepting it for so long, and now we must accept another truth. This is what we mean when we talk about relative and ultimate truth.

How quickly we can progress depends on how brave we are and how open our minds are. If you enter into a conversation already convinced of your point, and you are there only to prove your point, then no matter how much debate occurs, it won't change your mind. This is what it means to have a closed mind. You shut the door and nothing can get in. You must go instead with an open mind and ready to accept the truth, if you want to learn.

Giving Up Ordinary Happiness: the Luxury of Suffering

The reason we are in saṃsāra is because of our own emotions—we all understand that. We say we want to get rid of our suffering. We think that what is keeping us in saṃsāra is our desire, anger, and ignorance. Well, suffering is easy to give up. Nobody wants suffering. If you could, you'd give up all your suffering in the blink of an eye—in a microsecond. The tricky part or difficult part is that we must also give up our happiness. Suffering gives us trouble and problems; this is obvious. But

the happiness we experience—small things like weekends, holidays, ice-cream—all these small things that give pleasure are also keeping us in saṃsāra. It's easy to give up or renounce stomachaches, headaches, or work that you don't like. These are not really the things giving us suffering, because they are easy to give up. Maybe you have things in your home that you are not attached to, things you don't need or want, or things you don't feel are important. It's easy to give them up. You don't want this pair of shoes, so you give them away, and you have no regret. But if you turn to things you like, it's a different matter. Maybe you own a phone, a computer, TV, or a car. If somebody were to ask you to give these to them, it would be painful. You'd find excuses. These are the things keeping us in saṃsāra. The things that we ordinarily call happiness are really just another form of suffering. I feel compassion towards all the people going through obvious suffering in saṃsāra, but I feel equal or even greater compassion towards those who are living happy lives. That happiness and those small pleasures are the things keeping them—keeping us—in saṃsāra.

This is why we say that we have the luxury of suffering. For people who want to practice and understand the Buddha's teaching, suffering is the most important thing we have, because it causes us to turn to the Dharma. Of all the suffering in our lives, the greatest is death. Now please understand, I do not mean that we should want to kill ourselves or harm ourselves

because suffering and death are so valuable—no! If you are not alive, then you will not be able to practice. Harming yourself or killing yourself is considered to be a strong misdeed or sin. Your human body and life give you the opportunity to understand the truth and to practice Dharma, and harming yourself means blocking yourself from these opportunities. Therefore, you should try to do everything in your power to keep yourself alive, safe, and healthy, in order to learn and practice the Dharma.

However, as I said, what drives us to the Buddha's teachings is our suffering. This is because if we are not suffering in anyway, then we will not try to find a way out of saṃsāra. Who would want to escape saṃsāra if they had no suffering whatsoever? Why would it occur to them? We all want the weekends to come because the work week is difficult. We see that something is good because we see that something else is bad, and vice versa. Someone is rich because we also have poor people. If there were no poor people, then there would be nothing special about rich people. It would all be the same.

So then being healthy and alive has value because there is death. This is why death is important. Death and suffering are the main encouragements that drive us to the Buddha; it isn't that they are good, but that they give us the opportunity to turn to the teachings.

Faith

For a long time, it was hard for me to understand why gurus are important. Especially in the Vajrayāna, there is nothing more important than faith in our gurus. There is a Pali tradition and a Sanskrit tradition, and within the Sanskrit or Mahāyāna tradition, there is nothing higher than the Vajrayāna. Vajrayāna is an advanced teaching beyond everything else, and in the Vajrayāna, faith in the guru is very important. However, if we can read and understand the texts, why do we need gurus?

Imagine someone you love very much. It could be your wife, your children, your parents, or a friend, or anyone else. If their house is on fire, you will not hesitate to run into the house and try to save them. You would be ready to sacrifice your own safety and risk being burned or harmed. Now suppose the person is somebody you don't know at all, a stranger. You have never met this person before, but you can hear them screaming, so you know they are inside, afraid, and in danger. In this case, would you think before running inside, "Ah. I might get hurt. What if something happens to me?" For the one you love, you are ready to do more than is humanly possible, or at least much more than you normally could accomplish. Even if your flesh burned and you felt great pain, even though you might die, if there's somebody you love inside the house, you would not think twice.

To return to the reason gurus are so important, it is because the Mahāyāna and especially the Vajrayāna is such an advanced teaching, requiring such advanced mental processing, that you need such love. You love your guru to the extent that you are willing to do everything and anything for your guru. It is important to understand this; if a normal teacher explains things to you, you will think, “What is he talking about? What is the logic?” You will want the person to prove to you that what they are saying is right. With the guru, you must have faith and devotion, or love.

Faith and love are different things, of course, but I’ll continue speaking about this in terms of love. If you love someone with everything you have, it will be easy for you to follow that person. It will be easy for you to accept whatever they tell you. But if you don’t trust the person completely, things will be different. In that case, when you are told to visualize something, you might think that you ought to understand the logic of it first, or how you can benefit. However, if there is true love, you’ll do whatever you are told without any question. Then and only then, you will understand the Buddha’s teachings, or what your master is teaching you. Different people can receive the same teaching in the same session, and they will have different levels of understanding depending on their degree of faith. There is nothing magical about that. So much depends on how

much you believe in this person or trust them. If you are able to achieve this kind of faith, then there will be no difficulties.

How many people have changed diapers here? If you try to change somebody's diaper, and it is somebody you don't know, you'll be thinking, "Oh, this is so difficult!" But if it is your own child or parent, would you feel the same? Once, I was in Switzerland, and I was driving somewhere. In a parking lot, I saw a senior person who was wearing a diaper that somehow became broken. A lady was sitting in the car, trying to clean the stool and all that. And I thought, "This is wonderful." I don't know whether the person cleaning the mess was the daughter or a nurse or some other caregiver. If she was the daughter, then she had a daughter's love for her mother. If she was a nurse, she had real compassion in order to do that. I saw such a beautiful thing, and for a moment, I couldn't move. I was just looking at them. I stopped looking because they might think, "Oh, a creepy person is watching us." But I felt it was a beautiful thing because of the purity of that love or compassion. There was no calculation such as, "If I do this, I'll gain something." It was just a pure act. I thought at that time, if we all felt such love and compassion towards every sentient being, what kind of world would it be? In any case, if you have ever tried to do something like that, you know that you will be aware of how dirty the job is, yet if you love the person, you won't mind.

Now, if we go one step further, then we find faith. Once you have genuine full faith, there will be no suffering or hardship. Whatever experience you might have, you will be able to digest it and accept it. You will be able to go through much hardship when you have faith. This is such a beautiful and powerful thing, especially in the Vajrayāna. Faith is the most important ingredient, more important than your understanding and everything else.

Faith is the most important thing because we cannot practice Vajrayāna without bodhicitta, or the bodhisattva mind, which means having love and compassion for every sentient being in this world. Think how difficult it is to look after your own family. There might be at most eight or ten people in your family, and you can spend your entire life worrying about them, these ten people. Now, imagine if you are looking at all human beings, about seven billion people. Imagine how hard it would be to care this way for seven billion people as you do those ten. Then, with bodhicitta, we extend this same depth of concern beyond human beings to all sentient beings. There is no number for that. It is inconceivable. In order to have this kind of mind, one must have faith. Not simple faith, but an extraordinary kind of faith. The more faith you have, and the more pure your faith, the faster you will be enlightened. There is no better way to put it, and there is no way to sugar coat it.

In order to get out of the position in which we are currently fixed, we will need to be brave, for a start. Sometimes we jokingly say that to be a Buddhist, you need to be strong and brave. A weak person cannot be a Buddhist. Once you start the Buddhist path, there is not a single moment all the way to the state of enlightenment when you are not thinking about all sentient beings. There is no Buddhist puja, text, ritual, sādhana, or deity practice where you think about only yourself or your close ones or your family. Everything on the path is for all sentient beings. And in order to digest such a vast teaching, one must have faith. It is not humanly possible otherwise; it is not humanly possible to understand it. This is what I believe. Faith makes it possible.

Bodhisattva Vow

Now, the first thing I'll do is a simple bodhisattva vow. This is only four lines combining refuge and the bodhisattva vow.

Sangye chö dang tsok kyi chok nam la

Changchub bardu dag ni kyab su chi

Dak gi jinsok gyi pa'i sönam kyi

Dro la pen chir sangye drubpar shok

In the first two lines, we are taking refuge in the Triple Gem. Because I'm a dumb person, it took me a long time to understand what this really means. I was told that without refuge, there is nothing you can do to progress on the path, and so I thought, "Oh, in that case, I have to pray all kinds of different prayers, and I have to study many teachings about it."

Refuge means taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. The Buddha taught the path; the Dharma is the

teachings he gave, and the Saṅgha is all the people who are following those teachings. When you take refuge, it means that these three are the ultimate for you. Whatever happens, this is it—there are no *ifs* or *buts*. Whatever conditions or situations you encounter, refuge means having full faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. There's no turning right or left, but only one way and one thing.

This is the basis. This is where we start. The next two lines are the bodhisattva vow, which means generating bodhicitta. *Bodhi* means enlightenment and *citta* means mind. Bodhicitta mind means to think, “For the sake of all sentient beings, I want to achieve enlightenment.” As I said before, we are doing our practice for all sentient beings, always. There should be no question about it. We take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, and we follow the path for the sake of all sentient beings.

Dharma is the path to enlightenment, but there are many different Dharma paths: There is Vajrayāna, Mahāyāna, and Hīnayāna. Within the Vajrayāna, there are many deities, such as Vajrakīlaya, Hevajra, and Mahākāla. Today's initiation is Maitreya. The goal of this practice and the reason for this initiation is not so that we can meet Maitreya Buddha. The reason we are receiving this initiation is so that through the blessings of Maitreya Buddha, we will gain strength and

understanding enough to see the truth—relative and ultimate truth. This is the goal or the destination for every Buddhist. We don't do Tārā pujas so that we will see Tārā. Sometimes people say that they want to do Tārā pujas in order to have a longer life, or a better business, or to get a promotion—the “I want this or that.” But these are narrow motivations. They tie us to saṃsāra. You should understand that if you want the promotion or you want wealth, and you get these things, then you will want more. With such motivations, we are only keeping ourselves in saṃsāra, and our goal is to go beyond saṃsāra. Through the power and blessings of Tārā, Hevajra, Avalokiteśvara, and other deities, we will be able to see, understand, and accept the truth. That is it! That's everything. And this is why refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha is so important, and why bodhicitta is so important.

Now, repeat after me these four lines; this is the bodhicitta vow.

[Recitation]

Before we begin the initiation, we will do a short meditation. This is because without actual meditation, there is no enlightenment. Meditation does not mean what many people think it does. People will say, “I did meditation today, and now I feel very relaxed.” That is not the point of meditation, and if it is, then you are not practicing Buddhist meditation. A relaxed state might be one effect of meditation, but we mean to

accomplish something different. By meditation, we mean the practice of śamatha and vipasanna (or *vipaśyanā* in Sanskrit). The first part, śamatha, means to remain focused. This is the beginning and a necessary foundation. We train in śamatha so that we can single-pointedly focus on seeing the truth—relative and ultimate truth. We perform this training by keeping the mind on an object—any ordinary object such as a flower or a statue or someone you love. The goal here is simply to keep the mind focused.

Ordinary mind is in constant movement, without ceasing. It is like this mala with one hundred and eight beads arranged in a circle: there is no end to it. Another way to think about it is to consider the thoughts in the mind as a stream or a waterfall, which may seem to be one thing but is in constant motion and made up of many droplets of water. Thoughts of today's experiences, yesterday's experiences, our dreams and expectations, all flow through the mind. They are all mixed together, and they fill our minds constantly. That is the point of saying the mind is like a waterfall.

Now, let's do a short meditation so that we can develop our focus and pacify these many thoughts, knowing that they will be obstacles for us that will hinder the initiation.

[The initiation is given.]

About Samayā

People sometimes get a little confused about this. Samayā is, if I can put it in a simple term, the deal you make with your master. When you request an initiation, samayā is what you bring to the table, or what you are willing to give to the master in return for receiving the initiation. The master might say you have to do a retreat for ten or twenty years but not say this to someone else who is receiving the same initiation at the same time. Samayā is a very individual thing. Of course, there are also *common samayā*, but essentially, samayā is a personalized promise to the master that you will do whatever it is he asks—the retreat, the sādhana, the mantra—or that you will give something up such as alcohol.

Samayā means *promise*, and so breaking the samayā means that you are breaking a promise. Let's say that the samayā I commit to for receiving an initiation is that I will stop drinking. But one day I say, "Oh, I can drink a little bit." This is breaking the samayā, and there is no greater sin or downfall for a Vajrayāna practitioner. There is no greater danger than this. The samayā is the most sacred and the most important thing that you have to keep.

Conclusion to the Initiation: About Dedication of Merit

After receiving samayā, there is a thanksgiving maṇḍala offering followed by the dedication prayer. Just as the preliminary part—taking refuge and generating bodhicitta—is the same regardless of the main practice that follows, the concluding part is also always the same. The main part can be a ritual, a retreat, a sādhana, or any other kind of practice. Here, of course, the main part was the initiation. So, in the concluding dedication, we dedicate whatever merits we have accumulated from the practice to all sentient beings. Remember that I said in the beginning that there is no Buddhist practice that you do only for your own sake.

You should understand how merit works. The more that you share it, the greater it becomes. If you practice sharing your merit while thinking, “I only want this merit to be dedicated to my children, or my family,” then your merit will be small. If, on the other hand, you dedicate the merit to all sentient beings, then the merit itself becomes far greater.

This principle is important to understand because the two things that you need to become enlightened are *merit* and *wisdom*. Merit is somewhat easier to acquire than wisdom because you can obtain it through good deeds—things like life releases and helping other people. You can do these things and then dedicate the merit to increase it. As for wisdom, I cannot stress strongly enough that you cannot gain wisdom without practicing emptiness. There are two kinds of merit: general merit and wisdom merit, and wisdom merit is only gained through practice of emptiness to acquire wisdom.

No matter what other practices you do, in the end, you must meditate on emptiness because this is the only true antidote to selfish thought. Selfish thought is the final barrier; all the negative emotions and suffering arise from it. The final thing that you have to clear is selfish thought, and you do this through meditation on emptiness. This is why emptiness is the deepest and highest practice of all. I do not say this because I have experienced enlightenment. I say it because our great masters have gone the entire path, beginning with the Buddha, and they tell us this. The Buddha did not have somebody do it for him or give him enlightenment. He went through physical suffering and mental difficulty, and eventually he gave up everything to attain enlightenment. And then he taught the Dharma to tell us how it

is. Now, what we must do is accept the truth. Between you and enlightenment, there is only one obstacle, and it is you.

Likewise, nobody else can make you enlightened, not even the Buddha. Even if Buddha came here today and stood right in front of you, he could not make you enlightened. But he can guide you. This is a very important point. We might think it is like what we see in superhero movies: “If Tārā, Avalokiteśvara, Mahākāla, or the Buddha came down from the sky and appeared before us, then they would do something to solve all our problems.” But this is not Buddhism. This is not the Buddha’s teachings. The Buddha taught that only you can save yourself. Nobody else can do this, because it is also you making all your troubles. *Nobody can send you to hell, and nobody can send you to heaven.* Remember this! You yourself have the ability to go to hell or to go to heaven or to achieve enlightenment. Who said hell is down there and heaven is up there? This is what we have learned, the law of saṃsāra. “Bad people go to hell and good people go to heaven.” We think these things because we have been brainwashed, basically, over a period of many aeons and hundreds of thousands of lifetimes.

Saṃsāra is not some place encircled by an iron wall that we are trying to get out of. Saṃsāra is the wheel of existence—you are born, you grow old, sick, and you die and are born again and

again in different forms. You can have rebirth as a god, demigod, hell being, human, etc. This is why we call it a circle. This, too, took me a long time to understand because I'm so ignorant. There is nobody keeping you in this circle, and it is not made of steel walls or bars, like being in a prison. The circle of saṃsāra is nothing other than your own thoughts. These thoughts, as I said, are like this rosary, a continuous circle, or many thoughts joined together by a string. What keeps these thoughts going is something we call in Tibetan *panjak*, which simply means that you're used to it.

The moment you realize that saṃsāra, pain, and suffering are just your thoughts is the moment when you are enlightened. Enlightenment doesn't mean going to a different planet, some heaven where you'll be able to fly. Maybe we need to think about it that way sometimes to encourage us to do good things: "If I do good deeds, I will be reborn in a god realm, where existence will be very pleasurable." If I said, "Well, do good deeds, and you'll still be the same," then you might not be inspired to do good deeds. But if I say, "In your next life, you'll be rich, handsome, beautiful, and so on," then you might be inspired. And so I have to tell you, "It's so beautiful. You will have a six-pack, a great body," in order to encourage you. As normal human beings, we need encouragements. But the sooner you understand that

you are the one blocking you, the faster your enlightenment. As I said, between you and enlightenment, there is only you. Nobody else.

To conclude about samayā, faith in your master is the most important thing. Faith will solve most of the problems that you encounter on the path.

[Recites dedication prayer]

When we go on with our day after the concluding part, it is important to remain in the state without ego. This is why we dissolve everything into emptiness, including yourself in the form of the deity, if that's the practice.



- His Holiness the 43rd Sakya Trizin, Gyana Vajra Rinpoche, is the second son of His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (the 41st Sakya Trizin). He belongs to the noble Khön family, whose successive generations have provided an unbroken lineage of outstanding Buddhist masters.

At an early age, Rinpoche undertook his training in the principal rituals and prayers of the Sakya lineage. Rinpoche has received from His Holiness the Sakya Trichen most of the major initiations, empowerments, oral transmissions, blessings, and pith instructions that are inherent to the Sakya lineage. Furthermore, Rinpoche has received numerous common and uncommon teachings from some of the pre-eminent teachers of Tibetan Buddhism of our age.



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