



# True Happiness and the Power of Compassion

His Holiness the Sakya Trichen



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Published by “The Sakya Tradition”

<https://sakyatradition.org>

Email : [info@sakyatradition.org](mailto:info@sakyatradition.org)

Wechat ID : sakyatradition

Weibo : sakyatradition

IG: the\_sakya\_tradition

Facebook: TheSakya

Soundcloud: the-sakya-tradition

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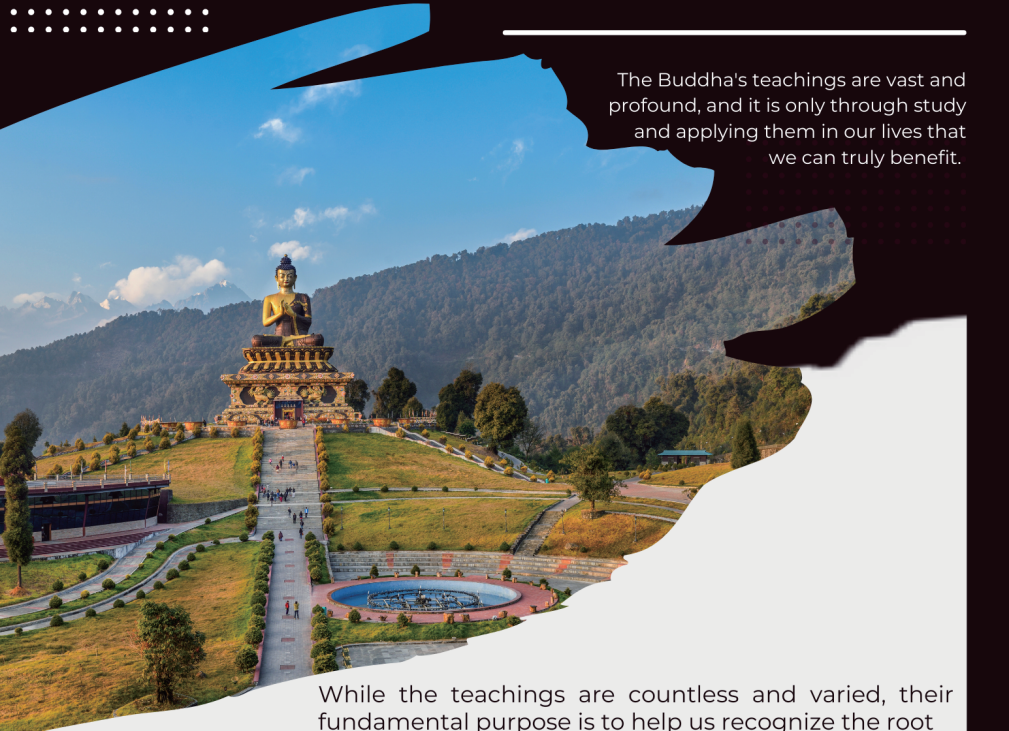
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By the merit of this work, may His Holiness the Sakya Trichen enjoy perfect health and a very long life, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.

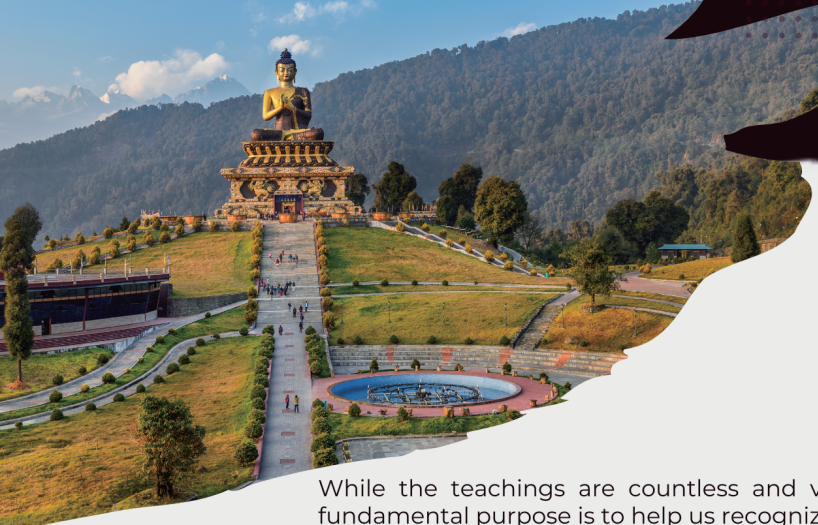


# EDITORIAL PREFACE

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The Buddha's teachings are vast and profound, and it is only through study and applying them in our lives that we can truly benefit.



While the teachings are countless and varied, their fundamental purpose is to help us recognize the root causes of our suffering (duḥkha) and eliminate them entirely, leading to the state of ultimate happiness. Some teachings address our more apparent defilements, while others guide us to explore deeper, subtler aspects of our being. Regardless of the form these teachings take, they all ultimately point to the same path.

Beginners may feel overwhelmed by the immensity of the Dharma, unsure of where to begin. Even those who have embarked on the journey may find themselves lost, clouded by confusion and unable to see the way ahead.

In this teaching, His Holiness provides a clear, step-by-step outline of the path to Buddhahood, making the road of Dharma accessible to all. Beginners can use this as a guide to grasp the essential points of practice, while advanced practitioners can refer to it to overcome any obstacles along the way. Whether new to the teachings or seasoned in practice, all can follow this clear path, steadily progressing toward the ultimate goal of awakening.

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## Introduction

**G**ood morning everyone. I would like to welcome you all to today's event. As you know, this is my first visit to Norway. As I was coming from the airport, I saw that the country is very clean, green, and beautiful. I hear that the people of Norway care very much about the environment. I think this is a good thing. Especially for future generations, we need to look after the environment so that many generations can live happily and peacefully and harmoniously. I appreciate all the work that you are doing here.

Today's topic is happiness and the power of compassion.

As human beings, we require many things in our lives. We need houses, clothes, food, friends, companions, and many other things. But the most important of all is spiritual practice. I'm not saying we all should practice Buddhism, in particular—I mean any kind of spiritual practice. People have different ideas, problems, and

tastes, and so we require a variety of spiritual paths to meet them. It's like medicine: there isn't one medicine that can cure all diseases. We need different medicines for different illnesses. For our spiritual needs, too, we need a variety of paths. I think that Christianity is more suitable for some. For others, Hinduism. For others, Islam. For others, Buddhism. It isn't right to say that this religion is better than that one. Different religions and traditions are important for meeting the needs of different people, just like a particular medicine can be good for one patient but not good for another. This is why I respect all the religions of the world.

Also, the need of the hour is that we should unite and work together to solve the problems of the world—with so many wars, pandemics, natural disasters, and other problems. In Buddhism, we talk about interdependent origination, which means that everything is related to everything else. When we forget this and we do not care about the environment, about mother nature, we create problems like climate change, and so on. Each of us has the responsibility as human beings to look after the world and to make the world happier, more joyful, more peaceful, more compassionate, and more harmonious. I'm a Buddhist, and from a Buddhist point of view, all sentient beings are the same and are proper objects of our love and compassion. Even animals have a right to live peacefully and happily.



According to Buddhism, all sentient beings have buddha nature. Buddha nature means that the true nature of the mind is never stained with obscurations. The true nature of the mind is pure, and there is no difference, on a fundamental level, between our minds and the Buddha's enlightened transcendental wisdom. At the moment, however, there is a vast difference between sentient beings' minds and the buddhas. As mere sentient beings, we do not have choice, freedom, or power. Wherever the winds of our karma and defilements blow, that is where we must go. We aren't able say, "I will be born here," or "I will be there." We go wherever we are led by our karma and defilements.

This is because we do not see the true nature of our minds. At the moment, they are covered with the two obscurations—the obscuration of the defilements and the obscuration of knowledge. The buddhas have truly eliminated all forms of obscuration, and so they see the true nature of the mind—we say they are enlightened. They have full power, full wisdom, and full compassion. Even though we all have buddha nature, there is a vast difference between sentient beings and buddhas, and our goal is to become buddhas one day.

How can we accomplish that? The only way is to practice the Dharma. I'm speaking according to the Buddhist tradition. If you

are a Buddhist, if you want to follow the Buddhist way of life, then the way is to practice the Dharma. *Dharma* is a Sanskrit word, and it has different meanings in different contexts. Here we mean that the Dharma is something to help us transform our minds, which are so wild and untamed, so easily involved with the defilements such as desire, anger, ignorance, pride, jealousy, impatience, and so on. Our minds need to be changed and such faults eliminated. We need to develop loving-kindness, compassion, and other good qualities instead.

If you do this, according to Buddhism, eventually you can eliminate all the obscurations, and you will see the true nature of the mind. In short, Buddha is not elsewhere; Buddha is within our minds, and by eliminating the obscurations, the true nature of our minds will be manifest. For this to happen, we have to practice Dharma.

To practice Dharma, we need the right methods, the right causes and conditions. By meeting with the right methods, the right causes and conditions, every sentient can become buddhas because of buddha nature. But according to Buddhism, it is human beings who have the best opportunity to do this. This is because the human mind is so much more powerful than the minds of animals. Because of human intelligence, human beings can do wonders, and human beings can also do the most evil things.

Animals—precious animals like tigers and lions—are violent by nature, but how much damage can a tiger really do? Tigers kill other sentient beings for their food. But apart from that, they are not capable of doing great harm. We human beings can destroy the whole world in a few minutes. On the positive side, we can also do very good things that will bring happiness and joy to many beings. We can do the worst, and we can also do the best. Because of this potential—because the human mind is very powerful—it means that birth into a human life is a very precious opportunity.

## Difficulty of Obtaining a Human Birth

**A**ccording to the Buddhist teachings, a human life is difficult to obtain from many points of view. We say it is difficult to obtain from the points of view of cause, number, example, and nature.

First, from the cause point of view, it is difficult to obtain a human rebirth because to do so means that one has abstained from negative deeds and practiced virtuous deeds. When you look around the world, you see that there are very few people who practice virtuous deeds and very many who practice non-virtuous ones. Very few have the cause of a human rebirth in the next life.

A human rebirth is also difficult to obtain from the number point of view. Once, a Tibetan lama was giving a teaching. He said that human beings are very rare and very few in number compared to all the other kinds of sentient beings. There was a Chinese man in the audience who said, "Obviously, the lama has never been to China." It's true that there are many human beings in China.

It's true that there are many people on the planet. But when you compare their numbers with other living beings, there really are not so many.

For example, it's easy to count how many people live in a single country, but it's impossible to count the germs living even in a very small place. So many germs are destroyed so easily. Compared to other forms of living beings, human beings truly are few in number. This is what we mean by a human birth being rare and precious from the number point of view.

Third, we say it is rare from the example point of view. Here is an example: If you throw a handful of peas against the wall, it's almost impossible that any of them will remain on the wall. Everything will fall to the ground. A human rebirth is as rare as a pea sticking to the wall.

Finally, we say it's rare from the nature point of view. In particular, a human life endowed with the eighteen prerequisites is rare. Having the eighteen prerequisites means to be free from the eight unfavorable places and to have the ten favorable circumstances.

When the teachings say unfavorable places, they mean places in which there is no opportunity to practice Dharma. In the hell realm, for example, there is so much suffering that the beings there

don't have any opportunity to practice Dharma. In the hungry ghost realm, beings have so much hunger and thirst that they also have no opportunity to practice Dharma. Although we can't see the hell realm, and we can't see the hungry ghost realm, we can learn about them from the authentic teachings. We can learn about these beings' natures, their sizes, their lifespans, and so on.

As for the animal realm, we do not need to rely on the teachings because we can see for ourselves how animals suffer. Animals are very ignorant, and thus they have no way of knowing what is right and wrong. Thus, they have no opportunity to practice Dharma.

Above humans, in the god realm, beings experience so much pleasure and so much enjoyment that they don't see the need to practice Dharma. They have the opportunity, but they don't use it. There is a section of the god realm called the long-lived gods. These beings live for a very long time, and their mental activity ceases in a kind of blissful samadhi that lasts for aeons. But then, eventually, this state ends. They, too, don't have the opportunity to practice Dharma.

In the human realm, there are also many people who never have the opportunity. First, there are barbarians, people who live deep in the jungle, for example, who never have an opportunity

to study. Second, there are people who are committed to wrong views: some do not believe in the law of karma, rebirth, or the Buddha's teachings. They, too, do not have the opportunity to practice Dharma.

Third, there are people born into aeons when no Buddha has appeared. Aeons in which a buddha appears are called light aeons. Those in which no buddha appears are called dark aeons. There are many, many dark aeons and very few light ones. If a buddha does not appear, then there is no Dharma to learn. Fourth, there are people who have serious defects in their organs. If someone is seriously intellectually disabled, they will have no opportunity to practice Dharma. These are the four human states where there is no opportunity.

We, however, are free from all these circumstances—the eight unfavorable places. But it's not enough just to be free from these. We need to be in a favorable place. The teachings count ten favorable circumstances, five from our own side and five obtained from another.

First, you have to be born as a human being. Second, you have to be born in a centrally located place. *Centrally located* has two meanings. Geographically, it means a place like Bodhgaya in India,

full of many shrines, and the place where the past buddhas and the present Buddha attained enlightenment. The other meaning of *centrally located* is a place where there are monks, nuns, and lay followers, both male and female. Third, you need to have sound organs so that you can comprehend the teachings.

Fourth, you cannot have committed one of the heinous crimes. According to the general Buddhist teachings, there are five heinous crimes: killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing arhats, causing a buddha's body to bleed, and creating disharmony in the Saṅgha. If you have committed any of these, then it is difficult to enter the path. Fifth, one needs sincere trust and faith in the vinaya, the collection of the Buddha's teachings on moral conduct. Moral conduct is the base for all the other qualities, just like earth is the base for all animate and inanimate things. These are the conditions that you have to obtain from your own side.

There are five that you have to obtain from others. First, you need to be born in a time and place where a buddha has appeared. As I said before, there are very few light aeons and many dark ones. The present aeon is especially fortunate because a thousand buddhas will appear during this aeon. Therefore, it is called the Fortunate Aeon.



Second, you need to be born in a time and place where a buddha has not just appeared but has given the teachings. When Lord Buddha Shakyamuni attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree, he did not give teachings right away. He said, “I have found the nectar-like teachings, but I will not give them to anyone, because nobody will be able to comprehend the profound meaning.” He didn't give teachings for several weeks after attaining enlightenment. Then, followers of Lord Brahma came to the Buddha and offered him golden wheels with a thousand spokes. Only then did he give the teachings—he turned the wheel of Dharma.

Third, you need to be born in a time and place when the teachings are a living tradition. There have been many buddhas in the past whose teachings are gone. There are long gaps between the appearance of one buddha and the next, and if you are born during one of these gaps, you will not have the opportunity to practice the Dharma.

Fourth, you need to be born in a time and place when there are practitioners who can set examples, such as monks and nuns and male and female lay practitioners.

Fifth, you need to have the right livelihood for practicing Dharma. Serious practitioners often live in forests or mountains or caves,

apart from society, and so it is difficult for them to obtain food. I'm sure that many of you are familiar with the life story of Milarepa. He was a very great yogi, and he did not have food. For many years, he lived on nothing but nettles that he cooked into a soup, without any salt or anything else.

These are the eighteen prerequisites: to be free from the eight unfavorable places and to have the ten favorable circumstances. All this is meant to demonstrate how extremely difficult it is to obtain a human birth. As I said, it is rare from the cause point of view, from the number point of view, from the example point of view, and the point of view of its own nature. Right now, we have all these things, these prerequisites. We are free from the eight unfavorable places, and we have the necessary and favorable conditions. Right now, we have a great opportunity that we cannot afford to waste. We should use this opportunity to practice Dharma and gain experience and realization.

As I said before, the human mind is very powerful. Although it can do the most evil things, it can also accomplish wonders—very great things. It is more precious to obtain human lives than a *wish-fulfilling jewel*. It is said that there is a jewel that can bestow all your wishes if you find it, and if you clean it, and if you offer to it on top of a banner. It can fulfill your material wishes for

food, clothes, medicine, anything mundane, but it cannot bestow liberation or enlightenment. However, with these human lives that we all have, we can find liberation and enlightenment. If we use our human lives as boats, as vehicles for traveling, then we *can* reach the shores of liberation. We can achieve enlightenment. This is why a human life is so very precious—rare and precious.

## Impermanence, Gross and Subtle

**W**e should practice quickly because our human lives are impermanent and fragile. The Buddha said that all compounded things are impermanent. He taught two kinds of impermanence, gross and subtle. Gross impermanence refers to what we can see changing outwardly all the time. Summer turns into autumn, autumn to winter, winter to spring. The colors change, the light changes, and so on. Our bodies, too, are continually changing. We begin as babies, then we become children, then teenagers, then adults. We go from adulthood to old age. Our appearance changes, our strength changes, and our knowledge changes. This kind of visible change is called gross impermanence.

The other kind of change is subtle or momentary impermanence. It refers to change that we cannot see because it is too subtle. The body, for example, doesn't only change from child to adult to elder. It changes daily. Visible or gross change doesn't happen all at once; it is the product of moment-by-moment change. Subtle change

refers to way things are changing all the time. At the most subtle level, all things are changing momentarily, in whatever is the shortest unit of time possible.

## **No One Can Predict When Death Will Occur**

A human life has no definite span. In certain universes, sentient beings do have definite life spans. They may live for 100 years, 500 years, or whatever. But as human beings, nobody knows when death will occur. Some people die soon after birth, some as babies, some as teenagers, and so on. Sometimes, humans are dead already when they are born. Nobody can determine or predict when their death will occur.

Generally, we think that old people will die before young people, but there's nothing definite. Many times, healthy people die before sick people, and so on. The only thing that is 100% certain is that anyone who is born will have to die. No one has ever been born and didn't have to die.

Many people prefer not to think about death, and so they avoid it. But this is wrong, because death has to come, and it will come, whether you like it or not. It is better to think about it in order to be prepared for it. It is said in the sūtras, “Tomorrow or the next life—which will come first, nobody can tell.”

Life is like a candle. It may be burning nicely, and then suddenly a wind comes to blow it out. Likewise, there are all kinds of obstacles that can arise—external ones and internal ones. Our bodies are formed from the elements, and when the elements are balanced, we are healthy and well. When the elements become unbalanced—maybe there's too much heat, or water, or wind—it creates a disturbance and we become sick. Disease occurs, and we might face death.

At the time of death, it doesn't matter how rich you are, how clever you are, how powerful you are, or how many friends you have. None of these things can protect you. Even people who are very powerful and have hundreds of bodyguards cannot be protected from death. The only protection—the only friend and the only thing that you can rely on at that time—will be your spiritual practice. Your spiritual practice will determine where you go, whether in the right direction or the wrong one.

### **The Mind Will Survive Death**

At that time, you will have to leave everything behind, and only the consciousness will survive. All the things you have cared about so deeply, including the body you have protected with a house, clothes, food, and more, will ultimately be left behind. The body

will be disposed of in one way or another, but the consciousness will survive. Mind is invisible and immaterial, and although we cannot see it, it is very powerful.

Everything that we do is done by mind. The good things that we do are done by mind, and the bad things that we do are done by mind. Every joy is experienced by mind, and every suffering is experienced by mind. And yet, if we search to locate the mind, we cannot find it. Mind must exist, but you cannot find it anywhere. Where is the mind? If you search every part of the body at every level, you cannot find mind.

Mind is something powerful, and so it cannot just disappear. What happens at that time will be determined by your karma. It will go to another body, or to another universe. According to the teachings, people who have committed many negative deeds will fall into the lower realms. Even if they are reborn as human beings, they will experience many sufferings. People who have done good things will be born into the higher realms. Therefore, while we are alive, and while we are still healthy, it is important that we practice virtuous deeds and abstain from non-virtuous ones. This is the law of karma.

## **Karma, Negative Emotions, and Clinging to Self**

**K**arma literally means actions. According to Buddhism, there is no creator who decides where to send people when they die, up or down. Our actions determine this. I have many friends who believe in the Creator. When something goes wrong, they get angry with the Creator and say, “Why do you make me suffer?” In Buddhism, you cannot get angry this way because there is no creator. It is your own karma—your own actions that will determine where you will go. The blame goes only to oneself, not anyone else.

Non-virtuous deeds, or bad karma, are deeds that arise from the negative emotions, and the negative emotions arise from not seeing the true nature of the mind. We cling to self although we do not have a logical reason for doing this.

If there is a self, it must be body, mind, or name. It isn't name, because name is empty by itself. You can change your name every day. As for the body, it is comprised of many parts. If you examine



the body from head to toe, there is not a single part in the flesh and blood and bones and ligaments and channels that you can call “self.” Different things are assembled together to form this body, and none of them are the “self.” Likewise, the body as a whole is not your “self.” We say things like “my body,” just like we say “my house.” When you say “my house,” you mean the house belongs to you. When you say “my body,” you mean the body belongs to you. The body, then, is not you.

As for the mind, it is always changing. Past mind is already gone, and future mind is yet to arise. Present mind, too, is changing at every moment. Something that is changing all the time cannot be the “self,” which is permanent. Similarly, just like we say “my body,” we say “my mind.” It means the mind belongs to you. So where is this great owner, then, who owns the body and mind and everything else? You cannot find this owner anywhere.

Instead of seeing the true nature of the mind, which is selfless, we cling to self. We do this because we have a very strong habitual tendency to do it from beginningless time until now. Whenever you have a self, there is desire for oneself and anger for others and ignorance in general. From these three main defilements—desire, anger, and ignorance—all the others arise. They expand into things like jealousy, stinginess, pride, etc. Then, from the negative emotions, we create actions—physical actions, verbal actions, and

mental actions. When you take actions, you are making deeds that will determine whether you will fall in the lower realms or be born in the higher ones.

### **Virtuous and Non-Virtuous Deeds**

There are ten non-virtuous deeds: three committed by the body, four committed by the voice, and three committed by the mind. The first is killing any living being, from the tiniest insect up to human beings. The second is stealing things that don't belong to you, from insignificant things up to precious ones. This can be done in various ways, forcefully or quietly, by cheating or other means. The third is sexual misconduct, which is to indulge in sexual activities with someone apart from your own life partner. These are the three non-virtuous deeds that are committed through the body.

Then, there are four non-virtuous deeds committed by the voice. The first is telling lies, especially in order to cheat people, and so on. The second is creating a schism or disharmony between individuals or groups. The third is harsh words that hurt others, such as saying very nasty things. The fourth is idle talk which means talk that is not useful, or talk about wars, about prostitutes, and other things that intensify negative emotions.

Then, there are three negative deeds committed through the mind. The first is greed, like when you see nice things and want them for yourself. The second is hatred, or wishing other people to suffer or to have bad things, bad luck, and so on. The third is having the wrong view, which means not believing in the spiritual path.

These are the ten non-virtuous deeds. As an ordinary person, it is very difficult to stop committing them straight away. We should first try to see them as faults and as our real enemies. Ordinary enemies cannot put us into the hell realms, but the negative deeds can. This is why we should see our own negative actions as our greatest enemies and try to minimize them and eventually eliminate them.

Next, there are ten virtuous deeds. They are the opposites of the ten non-virtuous deeds: abstaining from killing, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from sexual misconduct, abstaining from lying, and so on. If you practice these, you can gain happiness in this life and in future lives.

The ten virtuous deeds are our great friends. They can give certain joy and happiness through all future lives. Therefore, we should try to abstain from the non-virtuous deeds and perform the virtuous ones. Although practicing virtuous deeds alone cannot bring the eternal happiness of enlightenment, they will bring temporary or mundane happiness.

## Loving-Kindness and Compassion

**N**ext, you should practice loving-kindness and compassion. Loving-kindness means wishing that sentient beings have happiness and the cause of happiness, just like every mother does for her child. Every mother wants her child to be physically healthy and mentally happy. Every mother wants her child to remain continuously with what causes happiness.

We should want this for every sentient being because every sentient being is related to us. Every sentient being has been our father, mother, relative, and friend in past lives. Due to the change of life, however, we do not recognize each other. We see some as enemies, some as friends, and some we see indifferently. But in reality, everyone—even our most hated enemies—are our very own dear mothers and dear fathers. Instead of hating them, we should generate loving-kindness to everyone.

After loving-kindness, we can generate compassion. When you look around, you can see that the world is not happy. The world

has so much suffering—so many disasters and other problems. When you see suffering, compassion arises. Compassion means seeing sentient beings who are physically or mentally suffering and wishing that they be free from suffering and from the causes of suffering.

Compassion is very important. I believe almost all the major religions of the world teach the importance of compassion. In a way, you can say it's a universal religion. In Buddhism, we say that the whole teaching of the Buddha is based on compassion, especially in the Mahāyāna teachings. At the beginning, in the middle, and in the end, compassion plays a very important role in the Mahāyāna path.

### **The Power of Compassion: The Story of the Sailor**

Compassion is also very powerful. In Buddhism, as I explained, we believe in the law of karma—the law of actions that determines where you go in your next life. There is a story from long ago. In ancient times, there was a sailor who had a young son. In those days, it was dangerous to go out on the ocean to find islands and so on and bring back jewels and other things. One day, the man's boat capsized and he drowned. The mother dared not tell her son that his father was a sailor for fear that he would follow the same career. She was afraid he would also go to the ocean and die.

So she told him that the father had some other career—that he was a merchant—and the son followed suit. However, other people saw this and asked him, “Why are you are doing this business? Your father was not a merchant.” When he went to his mother with this news, the mother said, “Oh no, that’s not right. A merchant—clothes, incense, different kinds things.”

So, the son continued in his business, and he gave all the profits he earned to his mother. Then one day, someone told him that his father’s real career was going to the ocean and finding jewels on the islands. Again he told her mother. This time his mother said, “Yes, it is true. But I dared not tell you, because if you were to do the same thing, you could also face the same fate.”

The son had a great desire to go to the ocean, but his mother requested him not to. He insisted, and when they had a great argument, he kicked his mother in the head. Finally, he went to the ocean.

In the middle of the ocean, his boat cracked and it began to sink. He managed to hold onto a plank, and he made it safely to an island. He found a very beautiful house there and many beautiful goddesses, and they made offerings to him. He experienced great joy. After a while, he wanted to go again, and they all said to him, “You can go anywhere, but you should not go to the south. If you go to the south, you will find great danger.”

However, he didn't listen to them. He went to the south and found another beautiful house with more enjoyments and more goddesses, and so forth. Again, he stayed a while and then left. They told him the same things: not to travel to the south. And again, he didn't listen, and he went to the south and found a third house with even more entertainments, more goddesses, more enjoyments and pleasures. He was very, very happy. All this good fortune was because, earlier, he had given the profits from his business to his mother.

He was ready to leave. Again he was told, "If you go to the south, you will find disaster." He didn't listen but departed and went to the south and found another great white house. However, this time, when he saw the house, he was filled with terror. Just seeing the house produced this terror. He went inside, and he saw a man bound with rope. On the man's head, there was a big iron wheel that was turning and crushing the man's head. Brains and blood were thrown in every direction. He asked, "Why is this man suffering like this?" The man told him that those who kick their mothers' heads will be born here.

Suddenly, from the sky, a sound came. A voice said, "Those who are tied should be released, and those who are not tied should be tied." Immediately, the suffering man was released, and the son was put in his place with the huge iron wheel turning on his head. It caused

him terrible pain, and terrifying and intense suffering. Blood and brains were thrown in all direction. It was unbearable pain.

At that time, the son thought, “May this suffering of mine include the suffering of other beings. May all other beings not suffer.” Right after that, the wheel crushed him and he died, and he was reborn in the heavenly realms.

Compassion has such great power. Just one moment of compassion can rescue you. Maybe you cannot reach such an extraordinary level as in the story, but even so—just one moment of compassion can rescue you. Even if you are born in the hell realm, a moment of compassion can save you. The minute compassion arises, it can save you. Wherever you go, whatever you do, and with whomever you associate, you should always practice compassion. It will never let you down. It will protect you and give you all joy, peace, and happiness.



## The Suffering We Encounter in Saṃsāra

According to the Buddhist teachings, the universe is divided into six realms: three lower realms and three higher realms. The three lower realms are the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm, and the animal realm. The lower realms contain tremendous suffering. Many of these sufferings we cannot see, but we can read about them in the authentic teachings. As for how animals suffer, we can see that with our own eyes.

The three higher realms are the human realm, the demigod realm, and the god realm. The demigods are between human beings and gods. In that realm, beings experience much suffering because their nature is to be very jealous—they are always competing with the gods. Since their merit is not equal to the merit of the gods, they are always defeated. And so, they are always suffering.

The god realm is very happy and joyful. However, it's impermanent. The gods live very long lives and pleasant ones, but their lives finally come to an end one day. The time goes very fast

for them—when you have enjoyment, of course, the time does go fast. When the gods are dying, they can see from their clairvoyance where they will be reborn. They can see that they will fall again into a lower realm, and they suffer so much.

In the human realm, we can see for ourselves the suffering. We think that life is a mixture of joy and pain, but in reality, there is more suffering than joy. Even joy is really like another kind of suffering. Generally speaking, no one is free from the four major sufferings: the suffering of birth, sickness, old age, and death.

## Taking Refuge

**A**ccording to Buddhism, the way to be rid of suffering—the way to find eternal peace and joy—is to practice the Dharma, the teachings that were taught by the Buddha. And the first step in practicing the Dharma is taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. Taking refuge has different levels: worldly refuge and beyond-worldly refuge, or Theravāda and Mahāyāna refuge, and so on.

Mahāyāna refuge is said to have four distinguishing characteristics: its cause, object, duration, and purpose.

### **The Special Mahāyāna Cause of Taking Refuge**

The first characteristic of Mahāyāna refuge is that it emphasizes compassion as the cause. In general, there are three causes for taking refuge: fear, faith, and compassion. First, we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha because we are afraid of the sufferings we face. Second, we take refuge because we have faith,

or trust, that the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha can save us. Third, we take refuge out of compassion. When we suffer, we know how unbearable it can be and how difficult. Other living beings have the same experience. Therefore, we take refuge out of compassion towards living beings who are suffering.

In Mahāyāna refuge, all three causes are there, but the main cause is compassion. In the Mahāyāna, every practice that one does is not only for oneself but for the sake of all sentient beings. This means having great compassion.

### **Special Mahāyāna Object of Refuge One: The Buddha with the Three Kāyas**

The second special characteristic is the object of refuge. In all Buddhist traditions, the object is the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. But in the Mahāyāna, when we refer to the Buddha, we mean the Buddha with three kāyas, or three bodies.

The first is called the dharmakāya, which means the body of reality. The dharmakāya is referred to as a “double purity.” Why do we say “double purity?” One purity is called the natural purity, which means that the nature of everybody's mind is naturally pure. It is never stained with the obscurations. Everybody possesses this natural purity, but we don't realize this. We don't

manifest it at the moment because our minds are covered over with the two obscurations, the obscuration of the defilements and the obscuration of knowledge. The obscurations prevent us from seeing reality and the nature of the mind. Buddhas, however, through the accumulation of merit and wisdom, have cleared away all forms of obscuration, and this is how the second purity appears or is attained. Thus, we say the “double purity.”

From this explanation, you can see that the dharmakāya is not something external. It is actually within the nature of our minds. It is something we have right from the beginning. However, we don't realize this, or see it. It is not manifest. After the accumulation of the two heaps of merit and wisdom, the dharmakāya will become manifest—you will gain buddhahood. Buddhahood just means manifesting the natural purity of the mind through the elimination of the obscurations, which completes the double purity. When the double purity is gained, then you are enlightened; but in a sense, you are already there.

The second body is called the saṃbhogakāya, which means the “body of enjoyment.” You gain the external saṃbhogakāya qualities when you attain the dharmakāya. At the moment, we do not have these qualities. The saṃbhogakāya comes when the ordinary physical body—the impure and contaminated physical body—is transformed into the body of a buddha, which has thirty-two

signs and eighty qualities. Ordinary speech or voice, which is impure, is transformed into the melody of Brahma with the sixty branches. The branches are the different qualities of a buddha's speech, such as sweetness, and so on. Ordinary mind is transformed into the omniscient wisdom of a buddha, which is wisdom that realizes both ultimate truth and relative truth. The saṃbhogakāya is the highest buddhahood, and the saṃbhogakāya remains in the highest buddha realm, known as Akaniṣṭha.

The saṃbhogakāya has five certainties: certainty of place, body, time, teachings, and surroundings. The certainty of place refers to what I just described: the saṃbhogakāya always remains in the highest buddha realm. It doesn't travel to any other realm, but remains in Akaniṣṭha.

The second certainty is the certainty of the body. The saṃbhogakāya doesn't change and doesn't transform into a different body. It is always a buddha's body with the thirty-two signs and eighty qualities. The third is the certainty of time. There is no birth, death, old age, or sickness. The fourth is the certainty of teachings. The saṃbhogakāya does not give different levels of teachings, but only Mahāyāna teachings. The fifth is the certainty of surroundings, which means surrounded by the highest level of bodhisattvas, those just before attaining enlightenment.

The saṃbhogakāya is always there and never changing—always remaining permanently in the highest buddha realm. Therefore, it is called the body of enjoyment.

The third body is called the nirmāṇakāya. nirmāṇakāya means “emanation.” While the saṃbhogakāya remains in the buddha field, the nirmāṇakāya can go everywhere in different forms. A nirmāṇakāya can take a buddha's form, a bodhisattva's form, a śrāvaka's form, a pratyekabuddha's form, a king's form, a queen's form, a male form, a female form, an animal's form. It can appear wherever, whenever, and in whatever shape is required to help sentient beings. Thus, the nirmāṇakāya changes, unlike a saṃbhogakāya. In reality, there is no birth and death for a buddha, but buddhas can manifest birth and death, like our historical Shakyamuni Buddha did when he appeared in India. He was a nirmāṇakāya form who manifested his birth and passing away, or his entering into mahāparinirvāṇa, at Kushinagar.

### **Special Mahāyāna Object of Refuge Two: The Dharma As the Teaching and the Realization**

*Dharma* is a Sanskrit word with many meanings depending on the context. What we refer to as the holy Dharma in which we take refuge has two aspects: the realizations and the teachings.

Realizations are what the buddhas and bodhisattvas have gained, or the experience they have gained through following the precepts of moral conduct, the precept of meditation, and the precept of wisdom. This is one side of Dharma. The other is the teachings. Once they have gained experience and realizations, they put this into words in the teachings.

The teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha are called the tripiṭaka, which means the three containers. This is often translated as “three baskets.” The tripiṭaka includes the sūtras, the vinaya, and the abhidharma. The teachings in the abhidharma explain how we can attain wisdom, or ultimate truth. Ordinary people do not bother to find out what the ultimate truth is, but more intelligent people do. There are different answers in this world. Some schools say that everything is created by God, for example. Within Buddhism, there are also different views. The highest is what is known as Madhyamaka, which means the middle way.

The Buddha himself gave a prophecy that four hundred years after his mahāparinirvāṇa, there would be a monk named Nāga who would explain the perfection of wisdom. As the Buddha prophesied, a monk named Nāgārjuna appeared and he explained the middle way school. According to Nāgārjuna, ultimate truth is away from the four extremes of existence, non-existence, both, and



neither. If you were to say that something truly exists, this is the extreme of eternalism. If you were to say that nothing exists, this is the extreme of nihilism. To say both or neither—these are also extremes. Ultimate reality is away from all extremes and beyond explanation.

Nāgārjuna says everything can be comprehended in the two truths: relative truth and absolute truth. On the level of relative truth, he accepts everything: there is a world, there are beings, there is suffering, there is joy, and everything else. But what about the absolute level? If we say nothingness, this is also an extreme. Nothingness is not the right thing. Nāgārjuna therefore uses the word *sūnyatā*, which means emptiness, to refer to the ultimate nature of reality. To realize emptiness is to realize how ultimate reality is beyond extremes of eternalism, nihilism, etc.

The abhidharma is a kind of systematic explanation of the Buddhist teachings that, together with the sūtras, explain how to realize wisdom. To have successful meditation that realizes wisdom, you need good moral conduct as a base. Thus, the vinaya explains moral conduct.

These three are, as I said, the contents of the tripiṭaka: sūtra, vinaya, and abhidharma. When you have successful meditation by

following the teaching of the sūtras and abhidharma on the basis of the vinaya, then you can realize the ultimate truth. And when you realize ultimate truth, you can gain enlightenment. This is the Dharma.

### **Special Mahāyāna Object of Refuge Three: The Saṅgha**

*Saṅgha* actually means community, the holy community. When we take refuge, we take refuge in the Buddha as our guide and in the Dharma as our path. We take refuge in the Saṅgha as our companions on the path. The special characteristic of Mahāyāna refuge in the Saṅgha is taking the bodhisattvas who have already reached the irreversible state as the true Saṅgha.

If you need to travel to an unknown destination, you need a guide who will point you on the correct path, but just having a guide is not enough. The guide will show you the path, but you have to travel it yourself. A guide cannot just take you. In other words, you have to practice the Dharma, which is taught by the Buddha. The way the Buddha helps is not by performing miracles. The Buddha cannot take you to enlightenment, you have to achieve enlightenment by yourself. This is what the Buddha himself said: “You are the savior of yourself.” Nobody else can save you, and only you can save yourself. Thus, in general, all Buddhists take the

Dharma as our actual path, and we take refuge in the Saṅgha as our companions.

To summarize, the second specialty of Mahāyāna refuge, the specialty of object, means taking refuge in the Buddha with the three kāyas, in the Dharma of teachings and realization, and in the Saṅgha of noble bodhisattvas.

### **Special Mahāyāna Duration of Refuge**

In the Mahāyāna, the duration of taking refuge is from this moment until enlightenment is reached. In the Theravāda, one only takes refuge until nirvāṇa is reached. For the Mahāyāna, nirvāṇa and saṃsāra are two extremes. Saṃsāra is the universe with suffering and no freedom; nirvāṇa has no suffering, but it's considered another extreme. It is an inactive state of no suffering, not the development of your full qualities. Nirvāṇa is actually the biggest obstacle to attaining enlightenment.

According to the Mahāyāna, what we are seeking is above both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. It's called non-abiding nirvāṇa, which means nirvāṇa that does not remain in any extreme. Out of great wisdom, a buddha does not remain in the extreme of saṃsāra. And out of great compassion, a buddha does not remain in nirvāṇa.

## **Special Mahāyāna Purpose of Refuge**

The fourth specialty is the purpose of taking refuge. In the Mahāyāna, the purpose of refuge is not for the sake of oneself alone, but for the sake of all sentient beings. Gaining enlightenment not only fulfills one's own purpose, bringing eternal happiness and joy, it fulfills the purpose of all sentient beings. So, with this, I will conclude my talk today. Thank you, and I wish you all the best of everything.





■ 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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