



| Mind and Life

His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche



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



EDITORIAL PREFACE

Why do some people view a place as their ideal home, while others from the same place are eager to leave? Why do some find a dish delightful, while others feel indifferent or even repulsed? Why do some view an event as a blessing, while others experience it as a misfortune?

Are our perceptions and experience truly shaped by external circumstances, or is there a deeper truth we've overlooked?

In this teaching, His Holiness explore this fundamental question—one that lies at the heart of the Buddha's awakening. By seeing through the illusions of appearances, the Buddha realized the ultimate truth of existence, leading to his awakening.

Understanding this truth will reveal the root of suffering and open the gateway to liberation.

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Mind and Life

The mind is very powerful. It is the mind that performs all our virtuous actions, and it is the mind that performs our non-virtuous actions. It is the mind that experiences happiness and suffering, and it is the mind that will fall into the lower realms or take rebirth in the higher realms. Finally, it is the mind that gains liberation and the state of enlightenment.

In Buddhism, we do not believe in a creator. Instead, we believe in the law of karma. According to the Buddhist teachings, all the appearances that we see and all the experiences that we have are caused by our own actions. The primary element in action is the mind. Our minds are like the boss, and our bodies and our speech are like servants. Whatever the mind wants to do, the body and speech will follow. There is no action without the mind. A corpse, although it possesses body, cannot perform actions because it has no mind.

This is why we focus in Buddhism on the mind. It is said that if we wish to control our action then first we should control our minds. As ordinary persons, we cannot subdue all the fearful things in the world. However, by controlling our minds, we can control our responses, so that when we encounter frightening situations, we will not be afraid. If we are highly-realized practitioners, then even fearsome animals like lions or tigers will not be able to harm us.

Your own mind can be your savior or it can be your own worst enemy. Your best friend and your worst enemy are not found outside you; they are within your mind, in the form of your positive and negative thoughts. This is why the Buddha's teachings say that you are your own protector, and you are your own worst enemy. Your mind can be your savior because positive thoughts and a good heart will free you from suffering. When you have positive thoughts, people are less likely to become your enemy or to attack you. Developing positive thoughts will bring about this kind of temporal happiness, but it will bring the ultimate happiness of buddhahood, too. It is because cultivating positive thoughts can bring about the ultimate happiness that we say that the mind can be your savior.

Or, it can be your worst enemy. Śāntideva, the great paṇḍita of Nālandā University, wrote in the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*: “Even if all the gods and demigods were to become our enemies, they still could not give us the inconceivable suffering of the hell realm.” It is not possible to experience the suffering of the lower realms while you are in a human life and in a human body. No matter how much suffering it is possible to experience in a human life, it cannot compare with the suffering of the lower realms, and especially the suffering of the hell realm. No external enemy can give you the suffering of the hell realm; only your own mind can. Because negative thoughts such as anger can lead us to the hell realm where there is inconceivable suffering, our own negative thoughts are the worst enemy we can have.

If you can defeat the inner enemy, then naturally you will defeat external enemies. Śāntideva says in the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* that we cannot cover the whole universe with leather, but we can cover the soles of our feet. Then, wherever we go, we have the protection of the leather between our feet and the ground, and this is the same as covering the whole earth. Once you have defeated the inner enemy, your external enemies disappear; even if they want to be a cause of harm to you, they will not be able to do so. By definition, an enemy is someone who can harm

you or give suffering. But if no one can cause you suffering or harm you anymore, then you are truly free from enemies.

When the great Buddha Shakyamuni was doing meditation at Bodhgaya, many evil spirits tried to disturb him. They manifested as beautiful girls to distract him, and they manifested as fearful demons with sharp weapons to hurt him. They showered him with these weapons, but it did not disturb Shakyamuni at all. He was able to defeat all these attacks not through anger but through the power of loving-kindness and compassion. Through these positive thoughts, he turned their sharp weapons into flowers, and the flowers rained down as if to acknowledge his high realization. Achieving this kind of inner power through subduing and eliminating negative thoughts is how we will achieve real happiness.

Many people think that genuine happiness will come through material development, but this is mistaken. Since I was born in 1974, there has been great progress in material development around the world. In particular, the last forty years have seen more development globally than the last one hundred years or more. But this does not mean that people are happier today than they were forty years ago. People pursue material and external development in order to become happier and to live

better lives; however, while it is true that material things can be beneficial, they are not the real cause of happiness.

In the modern world, there is a great deal of suffering. There are many problems, such as extraordinary violence, for example. This clearly shows that material development is not a true cause of inner peace and the mental happiness that people seek. You cannot say that people living in developed countries or big, modern cities have happier or better lives than those living in less developed and rural areas. In 2009, I was in Sydney walking on a bridge. There was a man about forty or fifty feet in front of me, and I saw him tying his shoe laces. Then, he jumped off the bridge and committed suicide. We were not able to save him because we were too far away.

Development brings more material comfort and makes it easier to travel and communicate. But sometimes these very things also produce suffering. Technology and machinery have made it easy for us to travel long distances, even to far countries in only a few hours, but sometimes cars and airplanes crash. Such modern factors have both advantages and disadvantages.

We cannot say that a poor person necessarily experiences more mental suffering than a rich person. Poor people have nothing

to lose, and they have no court cases against them. They do not worry as much about protecting their wealth and possessions from people who they think might want to steal from them. Rich people have these concerns. Sometimes, rich people are so unhappy that they even need sleeping pills to sleep or other pills to help them deal with their problems and their mental unhappiness.

The best way to achieve freedom from suffering is not through acquiring many possessions. When you have many things, your mind will be busy with distractions. And while a rich person can, in theory, use their wealth to help many beings, whether this will actually help others depends on many factors.

Inner peace comes from one's way of thinking, not from outside us. Whenever we face problems or challenges in life, everything depends on how we handle it. If we are wise, then the problem will not affect our mental state at all. When I say "wise," I do not mean worldly wise. I mean having *real* wisdom. Those who possess wisdom handle life's challenges differently. They see things differently, and nothing affects their mental happiness.

How, then, can we learn to control and tame our minds so that nothing will affect our happiness? We can do this through

cultivating loving-kindness and compassion. We each have the wish to gain happiness and eliminate suffering for ourselves. Similarly, every sentient being in the universe has the same wish. Every sentient being in saṃsāra is acting all the time in order to fulfill that wish, and yet most people cannot get what they want.

Sentient beings cannot fulfill their wish to gain happiness and remove suffering because they do not understand what is the real cause of suffering and the real cause of happiness. Many people do not realize that virtue is the cause of happiness and non-virtue is the cause of suffering. People often think that wealth brings happiness and poverty causes suffering. Because of this misunderstanding, most of us put our primary efforts into gaining wealth. But if you do not practice loving-kindness and compassion, even if you gain great wealth, you will never have inner peace.

It is important to recognize the law of karma, or cause and effect, in order to have real peace and to overcome suffering. If you understand the law of karma, then you will understand the cause of happiness and the cause of suffering. In fact, the law of cause and effect is the fundamental teaching in Buddhism. If you don't believe in the law of karma, it means

you are not a Buddhist. It is important for us to know what is to be adopted and what is to be abandoned according to an understanding of karma.

The Buddha Shakyamuni said, “I have shown you the path to liberation. It now depends only on yourselves whether you gain liberation or not.” The Buddha leads sentient beings from suffering and dissatisfaction to temporary and ultimate happiness, and he does this by showing the right path and the wrong path. But the Buddha is not able to wash away our negative actions with his hands, and he cannot magically transfer his realization or ultimate wisdom to us. He can only show the way to the truth. He can tell us about the true nature of phenomena. Then, through his teachings—if we study them, contemplate, and meditate—we can be liberated.

This is why it is important to reflect on the law of karma. Once you really know that the true cause of happiness is virtuous actions and the true cause of suffering is non-virtuous actions, then you can begin to follow the right path and avoid the wrong one.

Of course, this is difficult because our minds are habituated to negative emotions and the actions that they lead us to. As

ordinary beings, our minds are mostly under the control of negative thoughts like anger and desire, and it is not easy to abandon these things without strong effort. Just knowing that they cause us harm is not enough. Look at people who smoke cigarettes: on the box, it clearly says that cigarettes are dangerous to one's health, but people who smoke have great difficulty stopping them, even when they know that smoking is dangerous and they want to quit. In the same way, it is very difficult for us to stop our desire, anger, and other negative emotions.

Even if we have a strong thought never to become angry again, anger arises naturally, and it is very difficult to subdue it or stop it. We do not become angry because we had a plan to become angry or made a decision. We experience anger immediately, whenever certain factors are present. The other negative thoughts are same: desire, jealousy, pride, and so on arise in our minds, even if we don't want them to. Negative thoughts control our minds because, at the moment, our minds are weak and unstable. If our minds were strong and stable, then there would be no opportunity for negative thoughts to arise the way that they do now.

Anger causes suffering because when we are angry, we perform negative actions that result in suffering. But even anger itself

is not a happy emotion. We are unhappy when we are angry, and anger makes other people unhappy, too. Anger even makes us ugly. When you become angry, you lose your gentle, smiling face, and it becomes red, wrinkled or furrowed, fierce, and unattractive. No one would want to be this way. But because our negative thoughts are controlling minds, sometimes we cannot help it, and we show such an ugly face to others.

Our minds can be divided into two aspects: wisdom and ordinary thought. We all possess wisdom, but at the moment, it is weaker than our thoughts are. For the most part, our minds are controlled by our thoughts, and our wisdom does not get the chance to subdue negative emotions. This is why it is difficult to become a better person. When we want to help others or study or practice the Dharma, this comes from the wisdom part of the mind. But, at the same time, our minds have negative and harmful thoughts that control us. The great Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, one of the five founders, said: “If your wisdom is under the control of thoughts, there is no liberation; if your thoughts are under the control of wisdom, there is no saṃsāra.” We should follow this teaching and try to control our thoughts with our wisdom and not allow our wisdom to be controlled by our thoughts.

If we want to achieve inner peace, it will require effort. Developing positive thoughts such as loving-kindness and compassion is not easy. A positive mind will not just arise naturally once we have decided that we want it. We need to make efforts to train the mind and develop these positive thoughts because at the moment our thoughts are stronger than our wisdom.

I began by saying that our minds are the most important thing because it is our minds that will attain liberation and enlightenment. To reach the state of enlightenment and ultimate reality, we need to realize the nature of our minds. I think we first need to understand the two truths—relative truth and ultimate truth.

Each of these two truths has its own reality. In relative truth, there are all the things that we hear, feel, and see. In relative truth, things have existence, although there is no such existence in ultimate reality. This reality of relative truth is like a dream or a magical show. We see, hear, and touch things, but they are not ultimately real.

In our dreams, we see many things and experience many vivid emotions. Sometimes, we experience great happiness in our

dreams, and other times, we feel very sad. But when we awaken from sleep, the reality of the dream is gone. We do not continue with that happy or sad feeling because when we are awake we recognize that all the experiences of the dream were unreal.

Just like this, the reality of our ordinary life is like a dream, or a dream vision. It is not ultimate reality. All things are impermanent, and they arise from their own cause and conditions. All things arise interdependently, and they have no inherent existence. Anything that arises in dependence on causes and conditions is subject to pass just as easily. They change. Whatever has ultimate reality, by contrast, will not depend on causes and conditions.

Like dreams, when all the right causes and conditions come together, then the dream experience arises. Similarly, when the right causes and conditions come together for ordinary vision, we experience ordinary vision.

The experience of our ordinary state seems very real or true—more than dreams—because the propensity for our ordinary vision is much stronger than the propensity for our dream visions. This is why people recognize dreams as dreams but not ordinary reality as like a dream.

Sometimes, when we are in a public place like an airport, we can sit and watch many faces pass, many faces of people whom we do not know. We do not talk to them or interact with them, and it's a bit like watching people on television. Or, if you review the past, it will be the same: the recollection is like seeing those people in the airport, or like watching the television. The people on TV are undifferentiated from each other, and we do not know any details about them, and it is the same when we see people in the airport. And when we recollect the past, we experience it similarly. We cannot really differentiate or really see the things or people that we recollect, because all this is in the past.

If we think carefully and analyze our experience in a detailed way, we will see that this present life, our ordinary vision, is like the vision of a dream or like seeing things on television, and this is what we mean by the reality of relative truth.

Then, there is the reality of ultimate truth. When we analyze and inspect the things that we see and experience in relative truth, we cannot find any ultimate reality there. We will not find even one atom that is truly, ultimately existent. Ultimate truth is beyond existence. More than that, if we follow the great paṇḍita Nāgārjuna's logical reasoning, then we will come to know that reality is beyond both existence and non-existence. It is beyond

both of these extremes. It is especially important to apply this insight to the mind. When we try to find the mind, we cannot; it does not possess color, shape, or size, or have any existence in ultimate truth.

We can come to know the reality of these two truths through the power of our practice and our meditation. If we can tame the mind through practice and come to know the two truths, then it will be easy for us to overcome negative thoughts and develop positive thoughts. The main method for achieving genuine inner peace and a happy mind is to realize the true nature of the mind through meditation. This brings us happiness in this life and in the next, and it will be the cause for ultimately achieving enlightenment.

Questions and Answers

Q: You have been speaking about the doctrines of the Mahāyāna. I wonder if you would say something about the Vajrayāna and what it is about.

A: It is not easy to say very much about the Vajrayāna to people who have not received Vajrayāna empowerments, but I will explain it in some general terms.

Mahāyāna is actually a general name, and it includes the Vajrayāna. Mahāyāna has two divisions: the Pāramitāyāna and the Vajrayāna, which is also called Tantrayāna. This is the understanding among scholars. But nowadays, when people say Mahāyāna, they usually mean only the Pāramitāyāna.

All the yānas or vehicles were taught by the Buddha himself. Ordinary human beings might distinguish some yānas as superior and others as inferior, but this is the result of our

negative thoughts and emotions. All the yānas were taught by the Buddha as methods to lead sentient beings from suffering and dissatisfaction to temporary and ultimate happiness. We should try to understand what is special to each and see the differences between them without thinking that one or the other is superior or inferior.

The cause Pāramitāyāna and the result Vajrayāna have many things in common. The ultimate view is the same in both. The ultimate goal of attaining buddhahood is also the same. The motivation is the same: the thought of renunciation, infinite loving-kindness, compassion, wishing bodhicitta, and engaging bodhicitta.

However, there are four special characteristics of the Vajrayāna. These are things not shared with the Pāramitāyāna:

1. In the Vajrayāna, there are additional methods for realizing the true nature of reality. All of the methods of the Pāramitāyāna are adopted in the Vajrayāna. Then, in addition, there are special methods like the descent of primordial wisdom during the empowerment.
2. The Vajrayāna has more methods to accomplish the

temporary and ultimate results. By temporary results, we mean things like a long life, gaining wisdom, wealth, etc. In the Pāramitāyāna, there are ways to accomplish these things. The Vajrayāna adds other, special methods. For example, in the Vajrayāna, you can practice a long-life deity. This involves receiving the proper empowerment, doing the sādhanā, a retreat, fire pūjās, and so on. To gain wisdom, there are wisdom deities like Ārya Mañjuśrī and others who can be practiced through ways: empowerments, retreats, and so on. For wealth, which should not be gained for one's own sake but for the sake of all beings, there are wealth deities such as Ārya Jambhala and others. Pāramitāyāna mainly emphasizes the six pāramitās, which are also in the Vajrayāna. But the Vajrayāna particularly emphasizes the two stages of generation and completion.

3. The Vajrayāna is an easier way to accomplish buddhahood. Although the Pāramitāyāna is an easy path to accomplish buddhahood, the Vajrayāna is even easier.

4. The Vajrayāna is a faster way to accomplish buddahood. It is said that if you practice in the proper way, and if you are the right person, then you can accomplish buddahood in this very life time.

There is another difference that I can mention. The cause Pāramitāyāna mainly emphasizes the mind and mental practices, while the Vajrayāna has a strong emphasis on the body. In the Pāramitāyāna, when we speak about the perfection of generosity, or the perfection of moral conduct etc, the emphasis is on mind and motivation.

For example, the perfection of generosity does not mean the elimination of poverty. It means having the wish to give to all sentient beings without exception. Even if there were no beggars or people in poverty, we can practice the perfection of generosity because its focus is the mind. The Vajrayāna, by contrast, has many practices that utilize the body, such as practices with the four inner elements.

Q: In your lecture, you mentioned that you witnessed a man who jumped from Sydney Bridge. If we ever encounter a similar situation, what practices can we do to help the person to be happy in the next life?

A: First and foremost, you should try to rescue the person. Maybe you cannot do it by yourself. In my case, my wife asked some local people how to call the police. We were told triple zeros, and she dialed the number. Police cars arrived, along

with a helicopter and police boats. They tried to save the man, but unfortunately it was not possible. After a few hours, they found his body. I was with a monk, and we were the main witnesses. The police asked us about the color of his clothes, his appearance, and from which part of the bridge he jumped. We explained as much as possible, and we showed where he jumped from. In any case, we failed to save his life.

If we cannot help by rescuing the person, we should pray for his next life. I think that prayers are the main method to help an unhappy person in that case, when a rescue effort has failed. We should pray for the deceased by thinking, “May that person obtain a precious human life.”

This is because a precious human life will give someone the best opportunity for practicing the Dharma. Humans are much smarter than even the smartest animals. People say that dolphins are smart, but they cannot achieve what humans can. Dolphins cannot become great scholars or study anything at all. Humans can acquire much more wisdom than even the smartest dolphin. Therefore, we pray that the deceased will gain a precious human life so that they will have the opportunity to practice Dharma. Through practice, they can gain wisdom; through wisdom, they can reduce or purify the obscurations,

accumulate the two heaps of merit and wisdom, and ultimately attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. This is our general prayer for every deceased being.

After discovering that the man was dead, we prayed in this way. Even if you don't know anything about the person's background or family, you should feel sadness and great compassion towards him. After you pray, then you should dedicate the merit of your practice to the person.



■ 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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