



Advice Before and After a White Tārā Initiation: On Self-Knowledge, Balance, and Acceptance

His Holiness the 43rd Sakya Trizin, Gyana Vajra Rinpoche



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By the merit of this work, may Their Holiness the Sakya Trichen, the 42nd, and the 43rd Sakya Trizins enjoy perfect health and very long lives, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.



EDITORIAL PREFACE

Before we habitually rush into new undertakings, it may be more necessary to pause—deliberately—and observe the mind in this very moment. What is it being drawn toward? Why are we here, and where are we headed?

This text does not offer ready-made conclusions. Rather, His Holiness the 43rd Sakya Trizin guides readers back to the immediacy of experience, inviting reflection on the most fundamental questions of *samsāra*, the practice of the Dharma, and awakening.

What unfolds in these pages is not a theoretical roadmap, but a sustained inquiry grounded in lived experience—one that encourages readers to turn inward and, through that process, develop a clearer understanding of their own minds.

CONTENT

Introduction	1
Meditation	4
About the Initiation	12
Post-Script: Become a Better Practitioner	16

Introduction

I would like for us to begin with a short meditation. Because we typically have many thoughts running through our minds, it's important that we become calm and relaxed before receiving an initiation.

We should also understand *why* we are receiving the initiation. The initiation itself is the easy part. The real questions are “What are our reasons for receiving it?” and “What are we going to do afterwards?” I believe that all of you have been studying Buddhism for quite some time. You understand that we are in *samsāra*, and that we want to get out of *samsāra*. We want this not only for ourselves, but for all sentient beings. You understand that we practice Dharma so that we can achieve Buddhahood for ourselves so that all sentient beings can also achieve Buddhahood. We should also understand what we mean by *samsāra*. We usually describe it as a wheel on which we go around: we are born, grow old, become sick, die, and are

reborn. This happens again and again without end. This is the image that we should have in our minds.

However, we need to understand a little more. We should understand what *samsāra* is made of and how it functions. *samsāra* itself is not something external to our minds. The material of which *samsāra* is made is our own thoughts, the stream of our thoughts. This stream is made of small thoughts which are combined or joined by our imprints. The circle of *samsāra* continues because our thoughts arise one after another like the flow of water. When you see a river or a waterfall, you see it as one thing. If there is a lot of water, you see a big waterfall, or a big river, etc. But in fact, the waterfall is only one droplet of water after another, all of them flowing together. Like waterfalls, when we look at our minds, we don't initially see them as continuums of separate individual thoughts. But if we look carefully, if we analyze our minds, then we will see that *samsāra* is made up of the stream of our thoughts joined by our imprints. To get out of this is the greatest challenge we face.

At the same time, we also should understand that the Buddha's teachings are very simple. All he wants us to understand is how all the things we do and all our thoughts keep us in *samsāra*. We need to think. When I say we are not already thinking, then you

might object, “I am thinking all the time. I am thinking what to do next, what to eat for dinner, what I will do tomorrow, where I will go on vacation, and more.” But this is the kind of thinking that keeps us in *samsāra*; the thinking I am talking about is different.

Meditation

Often, when we say meditation, we associate it with calmness or relaxation. Someone will say, "I did meditation today, so now I feel relaxed. I feel calm and happy." But meditation is more than this. Of course, the first part of meditation is getting your mind to be calm and under control, and that's where this idea comes from. In the first stage of meditation, you learn to keep your mind in one place. But there is a second part. In the second part of meditation, which is the main part, we analyze each and every thing in our minds. Meditation is not just sitting somewhere quietly. While sitting in a quiet place, your mind should be analyzing each and every thing in your life and in the world.

Meditation is a very powerful activity; without meditation, there is no enlightenment. We have to understand that without the help of meditation, there is no understanding of the true nature of reality, or no understanding of the ultimate truth.

Intellectually, we might know that we are in samsāra and that if we get rid of all our defilements, then we will be enlightened. If it is the case that we already know this—if we already know how to become a buddha—then why are we still in samsāra? It is because of our thoughts and because of our defilements. It is because our minds are not strong enough, not trained enough, for us to become buddhas. *Buddha* means “one who understands.” This understanding doesn’t refer to worldly things; it means understanding the ultimate truth.

That is how you will become enlightened. Really understanding samsāra, as the Buddha said, is like waking up from a dream. Whatever you experience in your dream feels real. You might feel the wind blowing, or feel happiness. Whatever you experience in your dream, you can actually feel it and even react to it physically. But when you wake up, you understand that it was just a dream. In just the same way, this world and everything in it is our imagination. Good things, bad things, and whatever else we experience, are just an image. There is no such thing as good or bad. These labels are created by our minds. We brand everything this way. In society, for example, if you become rich, or if you are successful, this is good. If you are poor, or if you are not successful, this is bad. The whole world works according to this kind of mindset. But in reality,

“poor” and “rich” are things branded in your mind. Happiness is the same way. What is it? Maybe this is a basic question, but it is an important one. We all want happiness. At least, we all say that we do. But if we seriously ask the question, “What is happiness?”, then we will be surprised to see that we can't really pinpoint it.

As I said, everything is branded. We label this as sour, that as bitter, something else as sweet. “Happy” is also a branding. If you do such and such, or if you feel certain kind of feelings, then this is called happiness. If you feel certain other things, then it is called suffering or pain. It's very important to understand this because when you do, you will find that there is nothing in samsāra worth having or doing, worthy of your attention and energy, or worth achieving.

We work all our lives. I am now forty-three, and I've been working for a long time. If I ask myself what I have done for the last forty-three years, can I really pinpoint something? These are things we all have to ask ourselves; we can't ask these questions of other people. We need to answer them for ourselves.

I've been thinking about what we mean when say we know other people. Of course, there are many people in this world I

do not know at all whatsoever. But if we come to the people we know in our lives, such as our co-workers or family members, we tend to think that we know them. But what do we really know? You might know that a person is elevated, or has such-and-such a skin color. You might know he likes apples, or he likes McDonald's, or whatever. These are things that you will pinpoint, and then say, "I know a lot about that person." But if you think more about it, it isn't much knowledge at all. If you really know all about someone, then you would be able to tell what he or she will do in the next moment, or what thought this person will have in the next moment. But in reality, even in the present, we don't know anything. Maybe, at most, you can place a person in a certain area, but you can't say at all what the person is presently thinking.

Now, let's move to people closer to you—your children or your parents. You will say, "Oh, I know everything about them." You know what they like and dislike. But do you, really? If it were true, then why are there so many quarrels in families? If everybody knows so much about each other, including what they think and like and want, why are there arguments? It shows that we don't actually know each other. In many situations, we find that the things the parent thinks or wants, the children don't think or want. And what they think or want,

the parents don't think or want. We really don't understand very much about our families.

We can bring this line of inquiry even closer: "Do I know myself?" When I first thought this, I got goosebumps. Really. It was quite interesting to me. It is a chilling thought, and a little bit scary. Not only do I not really know my co-workers, my family, my parents, or my own child, I don't even know myself. Of course, we tend to think that we must know ourselves, of all people, in an exact way. We know what we want, don't we? "I want to go there, I want to eat here, I want to do this, I want to have that." But in fact, we have no idea about ourselves. What time will I fall asleep tonight, exactly? I don't know. What will I be thinking in exactly three hours? I don't know. Can you say, "Well, in exactly three hours, my mind will be thinking exactly this or that?" We have no idea what our minds will be doing at any given moment in the future. We really have no idea at all about our own selves.

I find this fascinating. These are important questions. Day and night, 24-7, we are working for somebody, right? Supposedly, we are working for ourselves, because "I" is the most important thing in this world for oneself. But if you don't know who that "I" is, then the question becomes, "Why do we do so much work when we don't for whom we do it?"

I think that asking these questions of yourself will help you to be more controlled. Or, to use a Western term that I don't really like, to be more "down-to-earth." More calm and in the present. Otherwise, our minds are always in the future. We are always trying to reach towards the future, but when the future moment becomes present, there is always another future moment that entices us. It is an endless stream of reaching out to the future. This is why it is difficult to satisfy the mind. You might think that if you obtain some object you want, if you get some promotion, or if you can go to some place, then you will be happy. In reality, there is no such thing as satisfaction.

But don't think I'm telling you how it is and that you must accept me as the authority on this. I'm only sharing the experiences that I have had, and I would like you to ask these questions for yourself. It's much more important to do that than to hear me telling you what you're going to feel, this way or that. Ultimately, the most important person in this world is yourself. Everybody has their own mini world; we all have been the most important person in our individual lives. Each of us holds the most beautiful place in our own lives. Each of us has enjoyed the most delicious dish in our own lives, etc. Everybody has their own set of brandings: this is the best thing, this is the most beautiful person, etc. It's important to understand how

the mind is actually branding everything, and that things do not actually exist according to our brandings—beautiful or ugly and so on. We project; our own minds are making things beautiful, or making someone rich or poor.

These are important questions to think about because they can help us know the point of the practices that we do. What are we going to get out of Dharma practice without understanding samsāra and why we need to get out of it? To do this, we should understand how everything is branded by our minds. We have vague ideas that we know people, that we know ourselves. “He's in Australia, he's in Canberra, and he's a very good teacher and speaks very good English.” Or about myself, I can say, “Oh, I know myself. I like cricket. I like to eat certain foods or to go to certain places. I like certain colors.” But that's not the full *I am*. Once you understand this, it will give you real understanding of Buddhism and what the Buddha is trying to teach us.

It's so simple that for many people it's unbelievable. At the same time, you can make it more complicated, if you want, and study for many years or generations. But to understand the core of the Buddha's teaching, you only need to understand yourself. If I can put it in easier or more worldly terms, the moment you understand who you are and what you are, that is

enlightenment. Especially in the case of Vajrayāna or Mahāyāna, we know that we should strive to become enlightened. But to become buddhas doesn't mean we must go to a different planet to be reborn, or pass away first. It doesn't work that way. Understanding yourself is attaining enlightenment.

When you understand the self, there is no attachment. This is why we do meditation. Meditation is one of the best methods for asking these questions about the self. The Buddha gave all his teachings so that we can gain this result: understanding ourselves. Once we do that, then we are enlightened. As I said, these are really simple questions, yet very important ones.

About the Initiation

Today we are going to do the White Tārā initiation. This is basically a long life initiation. Those who have practiced Buddhism know that all the lamas and great masters tell us that our human lives are very precious. They have taught us that there are six realms of rebirth, and that the human realm is the most important and beautiful one for practitioners. However, it isn't only being born as a human that is precious. I used to think so when I first received the teaching, but it is not the case. There are many different kinds of people in the world in different circumstances, and not all of their circumstances are precious.

A human birth is precious because it is the consequence of past virtuous actions. But it is also only precious when we are physically and mentally fit. "Physically fit" means that we have the capacity to hear the teachings. "Mentally fit" means that we have the capacity to understand the teachings. It's not very helpful to just sit next to the master or guru, or even next the

Buddha himself, if we cannot hear and understand anything. What is precious is being born into a condition of physical and mental fitness—and also in an environment conducive to practicing Dharma. If someone is born in a war zone or some other difficult area where they suffer from drought or something like that, then it will not really be possible for them to receive and practice the teachings. Also, it's important to meet the right master, to be able to have conversations with them, and receive the teachings. There are many important conditions. Once someone has all of them, then the human life becomes precious. This is the kind of life we should want to prolong as much as possible; the reason for receiving a long-life initiation is so that we can practice, not so that we can enjoy more *samsāra*.

Receiving the initiation is like getting a license. After receiving it, you have to practice. Imagine being given a prescription from a doctor. Your life will not automatically become longer if you don't take the medication that the doctor gives you. There are many causes and conditions, and all of them must be followed.

Now we will begin the initiation. If you practice today's initiation, your life will be prolonged. I hope you understood what I was trying to say. I have a very limited vocabulary in

English. I worry that you will not understand me, especially because you have received teachings from Lama Choedrak whose English is very good.

Remembering All Sentient Beings

In the beginning, in the main part, and in the conclusion, you should think that you are not receiving this initiation just for yourself. You are receiving it for the sake of all sentient beings. With this initiation, you can prolong your life in order to practice for the sake of all sentient beings. You shouldn't forget that. If this motivation is not there, then you will not gain merit, no matter how many initiations you receive. The kind of blessing you will receive from an initiation is determined by the kind of mind you have when you receive it.

[The Initiation.]

Conclusion

In the conclusion, we dedicate whatever merit we have gained during the initiation to all sentient beings. This structure is the same whenever you do Dharma practice, including your sadhana. Whatever samayas you receive from an initiation, if you keep want to keep the merit for yourself, then the merit is going to be very minimal. Merit is something that the more you spread it, or the greater your view is, the bigger it becomes.

Therefore, we dedicate the merit to all sentient beings, not to some particular person or people, and not only to human beings, but to all sentient beings. If you pray, for example, only for your loved ones or your family members, the power will be very limited. In any case, remember that whenever you receive blessings or pray, and you do it for all sentient beings, then it automatically includes those particular people.

As Buddhists, we should never pray only for a particular person. Let's say your family member is sick, or your business is not going well, or you have some other problem. If you pray thinking, "Oh please, get me out of this problem," then the power of your prayer will be very limited. But if you pray for the sake of all sentient beings, there is no limit. It will become much more powerful, and you will receive much more merit. Without merit, there is no enlightenment.

As I said in the beginning, you must now practice. Also, take your medications, do your exercise, and eat healthy foods. Receiving this initiation without doing these things will not bring you a longer life. You should do what you already have to do, all your exercises and your walks.

Post-Script: Become a Better Practitioner

I've been asked if there are any samayas with this initiation. I want you to try to become better practitioners. Ask yourselves the questions that I raised about yourself, about happiness, about suffering. These things will help you.

Never think, "Oh, I'm just a normal person. I'm just a family person. I work in some office, or in some village." If you have that kind of mindset, it will be difficult for you to understand the Buddha's teachings. You need to be confident. Before you do any practice, you have to be confident that you can achieve buddhahood. There is really nothing stopping you from achieving enlightenment. You all have the ability and all the power you need.

Whenever I do these teachings, I never feel that I'm going to teach you something. As a Buddhist, my personal belief is that masters cannot teach you anything; what they can do is help you realize what you have and what you can become. But the power or potential is within yourself.

For example, let's say you are hungry and you want to eat an omelet. If there are eggs, a pan, and gas for the stove, but you don't know how to make an omelet, then you will continue to go hungry. But if somebody tells you how to crack the egg into the pan, add salt, and how to cook it, then you can eat. That person has not given you the egg or the pan, but now you can make the omelet and you can eat. Knowledge is simply unlocking the potential you already have.

The Importance of Balance and Acceptance

If you have any kind of problem, a family problem or anything else, I think there are two things that can help you become more calm. I can't really say "happy," but more calm. The first is to have balance in your life. In your diet, for example, it isn't good to eat too much or too little. In your work life, too much is not good, and too little is not good. Too much exercise is not good for your health, but going without exercise is also not good for your health. Even when it comes to medicine, taking the medicine is good and will help you, but if you take more than you should, then the medicine becomes the problem. Balance is needed even with love. If you love somebody but you have too much love, you turn into a stalker, or someone the other person doesn't want to be near. In the family, I always say, if you hug your children or parents, this is good for the first five seconds.

It's very pleasant and happy. But if you hug them all the time, or for too long, you will become someone they don't want to be around. They'll run away from you. There's a balance, and you should always keep that balance in whatever you do.

Somebody came to me once saying, "Please bless me because I have so many obstacles in my practice." I asked him what kind of problems. He said that he was falling asleep all the time. So I asked him how long he was doing his practice. He said, "I practice for twenty-four hours at a time." I told him, "You cannot practice for twenty-four hours at a time. It's not physically possible. A person needs rest in order to do their practice." Too little practice is not good, but it's the same with too much. In everything, we need to keep a balance, whether it's family, co-workers, food, health, and so on. Of course, it's also a very individual thing. I cannot necessarily say what is a good balance for you because everybody is different. People have different minds and different limits. This is also why you have to understand yourself.

The second thing is to accept what you are. We always try to be somebody we are not. We want to show others something, and so we pretend that we are greater, bigger, or smarter. But if you accept who you are, you will be more calm and relaxed. If I am forty-three years old, but I can't accept this and want to

be twenty, I will never be happy. I am forty-three, and I cannot change that. I need to accept that I cannot do many things that I could do as a teenager. I cannot run around all day because my knees and my back will hurt. A teenager's body is stronger and more active. Although I am not that old, I still have to understand my limits and accept my age.

Whether you are rich or not, how much money you have—it is just a number. I have met many different kinds of people in my life. I have met very, very rich people, and I have met people who don't have enough food for one day. It's not necessarily true that rich people are happy and poor people aren't. I have seen that richer people can actually have more problems. I have seen them have great stress and be in difficult situations. For example, the people who surround the rich are not always genuine people, so that they don't know if they can trust them, etc.

Whatever situation you are in, if you can practice balance and acceptance, I think you will become a better practitioner, a better human being, and a better person to your family and society. Over the years, I have received many teachings. But in my mind, I am, let's say, very slow and dumb. Nevertheless, whatever I have understood, whatever I have experienced, I try to share with you. If you can, if it helps you, please try to do

these two things—balance and acceptance. I am not saying that you must do this or that because you have received initiations from me. The deity that you choose to practice, whether you do your practice or not, how long you should do it—these are all your decisions. As a Buddhist practitioner, I can try to help you, but ultimately, I can only share what I have seen and what I have experienced.



■ 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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