

Teaching on Mahāsiddha Vīrūpa's Matchless Compassion

His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche

"The Sakya Tradition" Publications

2026 © All Rights Reserved



This work is provided under the protection of a Creative Commons CC—BYNC—ND (Attribution—Non—commercial—No—derivatives) 4.0 copyright. It may be copied or printed for fair use, but only with full attributions, and not for commercial advantage or personal compensation.
For full details, see the Creative Commons license.

Published by “The Sakya Tradition”

https://sakyatradition.org

Email : info@sakyatradition.org

Wechat ID : sakyatradition

Weibo : sakyatradition

IG: the_sakya_tradition

Facebook: TheSakya

Soundcloud: the-sakya-tradition

Youtube: @TheSakyaTradition

Twitter: Sakya_Tradition

Strictly Not for Sale. Free Distribution Only

Acknowledgement

His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, bestowed this teaching on June 21, 2022, at Tsechen Kunchab Ling in Walden, New York, U.S.A., in commemoration of the anniversary of Mahasiddha Virupa being accepted as a disciple of Nairātmyā.

In 2026, the English text of this teaching was prepared, edited, and published by The Sakya Tradition, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and making widely available the precious Dharma teachings of the glorious Sakya lineage. The Sakya Tradition team also translated the text into Chinese.

This publication was made possible by the generous donations of Maria Julia Silva, Sue Strong, and the Chan Family. We would also like to thank all the volunteers for their dedication and effort in bringing this teaching into publication.

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



Compassion sounds simple—until it is tested.

It is easy to feel compassion for people we love,
or for suffering we understand.
But what about someone who has hurt us,
angered us, or done something we find difficult to forgive?

How far can compassion really go?
And is it simply something we feel,
or something we can learn to cultivate?
This teaching begins there.

Content

INTRODUCTION **1**

THE PITH INSTRUCTIONS OF VIRŪPA FOR TRAINING THE MIND IN MATCHLESS COMPASSION **6**

HOW TO PRACTICE **12**

BODHICITTA **19**

CONCLUSION **23**

EDITORIAL NOTES **24**

Introduction

On the occasion of this auspicious day commemorating Mahāsiddha Virūpa's attainment of the first bhūmi, I would like to say *tashi delek* to all of you.

As always, it is important at the beginning of every teaching to develop total renunciation towards the whole of saṃsāra, and then to develop infinite loving-kindness and infinite compassion towards all sentient beings. On the basis of these, we should develop bodhicitta, both wishing and engaging bodhicitta. We should receive the Dharma with these thoughts established in our minds.

The teachings of the Buddha were not given only to be listened to, and they are not only to be studied and contemplated. Listening, studying, and contemplating the teachings are preliminary practices meant to prepare us for the main part, which is to put the teachings into practice.

Just as you might study a recipe and then prepare a meal for the sake of eating the food, you should study the Dharma in order

to practice it. Nobody would learn to cook, study a recipe, and prepare the food, but then not eat it or give it to others. That would be pointless. In the same way, if we do not listen to the teachings and study them so that we can practice them, it is a waste of time and energy. We should enjoy the real meaning of the Dharma just as we enjoy the food that we prepared in the example. Practicing the Dharma is the only way that we will know how profound and how precious it is.

The Ācārya Vasubandhu said in the *Abhidharmakośa* that on the basis of pure moral conduct, we should study the Dharma, contemplate it, and then meditate and practice. This is how we will enjoy the profound benefit of the Buddha's teachings. This structure applies to all the Buddhist traditions: both the Pāramitāyāna and Vajrayāna and all the other teachings and traditions as well.

If our daily practice is to be genuine Dharma, we need to have the right motivation for practicing. This means, first of all, that we should not have attachment to this life. In ancient times in Tibet, there was a great disciple of Atiśa named Dromtönpa. He saw that there was a practitioner devoted to acts of Dharma, circumambulation and so on. Dromtönpa said to him, "You must practice the Dharma." The practitioner increased his efforts, and again

Dromtönpa said to him, "You must practice the Dharma." Perplexed, the student asked what he should do. Dromtönpa explained that he must remove attachment to this life.

The point is that whatever practice we do, if we are doing it with attachment to this life or with the expectation that it will benefit us in our mundane lives, then our practice is not true Dharma, whatever profound or precious teachings we have received and are trying to perform. This is also what Ārya Mañjuśrī taught in the precious and profound teaching called Parting from the Four Attachments. The first line says, "If you have attachment to this life, you are not a spiritual (or a dharmic) person." Dromtönpa and Ārya Mañjuśrī are making the same point. The more we are attached to this life, the more we will have negative thoughts arising in our minds—not only attachment, but anger, jealousy, and other negative thoughts. Practitioners generating these thoughts will not win what they are seeking. They will lose it, because their actions on the basis of these negative thoughts will lead to more and more suffering. They will experience not only the suffering of the human realm but also the suffering of the three lower realms.

Those who are suffering or engaged in the causes of suffering cannot be called winners. If you look at the history of the twentieth century, there were many wars and violent conflicts. Some were winners and others were losers in these struggles. But now, for the

most part, it is just a memory whether someone in those times was a winner or a loser. Both have passed away. If we think from the perspective of the Dharma, both of them—winner and loser—and gone, so what is the point? In the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*, the great Ācārya Śāntideva said:

Nyisar nyigyur namtu shin
Dzawar mepar namgyalwar gyur
Dhargyal mepar gyurwa de
Deshin tamche mepar gyur.

Those who are our enemies will be gone.
Those who are our friends will also disappear.
Even I myself will disappear.
All will disappear; all will die.

Why, then, do we fight, if all of us are going to die in the end? At the time of death, we cannot take anything with us, not even a single penny. We will leave behind even our human bodies that have been with us for our whole lives. For this reason, there is no point in violence, fighting, or hating each other. Śāntideva also says that the real heroes are those who defeat their own mental afflictions or negative thoughts, not those who defeat other human beings. Through the heroic act of defeating the afflictions, we can gain happiness not only in this life but in life after life. We can eventually

gain liberation from the whole of saṃsāra and reach the state of perfect enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings without any exception or discrimination. Therefore, we should study the profound texts with a pure motivation, without attachment to this life, without impure thoughts, and without hatred or attachment to others.

The Pith Instructions of Virūpa for Training the Mind in Matchless Compassion

The glorious Virūpa said: [1]

Meditate on compassion toward those who are kind
because they have cared for you kindly since begin ningless time.
Those who harm you now are your mothers,
and in the past they benefited you repeatedly.
Lacking self-control, like the deranged,
they will fall into Avīcī hell through their negative acts.
By recollecting this of all beings in the three worlds of existence,
compassion will be accomplished.

In the first two lines, Mahāsiddha Virūpa says that we should generate compassion towards those who have cherished us with great affection, love, and compassion from beginningless time until now. This means that we should generate unfeigned and sincere compassion towards all mother-sentient beings. The next lines say that although we encounter enemies in our lives—those who don't like us or who try to harm us—these beings have also been

our mothers. In the past, they guided us and gave us great benefits. We have all been born in saṃsāra an infinite number of times, and we have had an infinite number of lives, and it is due to the change of our bodies from one life to another that these mother-sentient beings do not recognize their own children.

Next, he says that their minds are under the control of mental afflictions, like crazy or mad people. Because they do not have control over their emotions and actions, they have committed many non-virtuous deeds, including heinous crimes. As a result of their non-virtue, they will experience suffering, even the suffering of the hell realm. If we remember that all these sentient beings have been our own mothers or our own dear ones, we can extend our compassion to them.

The last line says that through this practice, we will be able to generate perfect and infinite compassion. Such a generation of great compassion, or the yoga of matchless compassion, is very important on the Buddhist path.

Not all compassion is great compassion. For example, if you see a person who is experiencing great suffering, and you just say, "What a pity," this is not genuine Buddhist compassion. Compassion means wishing them to be free from suffering and the cause of suffering. When you extend such a wish to someone, this is ordinary

compassion. If you extend such compassion to several hundred beings or several thousand, it is still not genuine Dharmic compassion, or matchless compassion. Matchless compassion means extending this wish to all sentient beings without exception.

We can read about people who risked their lives to save hundreds or thousands of people during the Second World War by hiding them in their houses or in their basements and feeding them, working hard and taking risks to save them from death. These acts were very compassionate acts, but they are still not matchless compassion, or infinite compassion.

Matchless compassion is genuine Mahāyāna compassion, which is for the sake of all sentient beings without any exception. There are different ways to approach this or to recognize the meaning of "all sentient beings." One way is to say that all sentient beings are those who experience suffering. Then, we can consider the different kinds of suffering. When we say that we wish to free them from suffering, we should think that this doesn't only mean suffering that people ordinarily recognize as suffering, which we call the suffering of suffering. We wish to free them from all three types of suffering: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and the suffering of the conditioned nature of all phenomena.

You might wonder about the śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and noble bodhisattvas. They do not experience the suffering of suffering or the suffering of change because they are free from mental afflictions and from the first obscuration. However, they still have the second obscuration, the obscuration of knowledge. Thus, they experience the subtle suffering of the conditioned nature of all phenomena. When we think about it in this way, then the object of our compassion means not only samsaric beings, sentient beings who dwell in saṃsāra due to the power of their karma and mental afflictions, but also beings who are beyond saṃsāra, which are the śrāvakas, pratyekabuddhas, and noble bodhisattvas. Following this explanation, we can understand how all beings except the buddhas are the objects of our matchless compassion.

We cannot physically rescue all these beings. It is not even possible for us to see them with our eyes. But mentally, we can extend matchless compassion towards all sentient beings without any exception. There is no barrier or obstacle for our minds. Our minds can extend compassion as far and as wide as space. Therefore, mentally, it is possible to extend loving-kindness and compassion towards all sentient beings without any exception. Genuine matchless compassion has no bias towards any beings on the basis of religion, culture, or country. It extends the same to all of the eight billion human beings in the world. It also includes all

the animals in the world. Mentally, it is possible to generate this kind of compassion, and we should achieve it in practice and not just understand the explanation.

Genuine matchless compassion is the root of all the Mahāyāna Dharma. There is a saying that if you invite a great universal emperor, then of course his entire retinue will come with him. It isn't necessary to send separate invitations to the entourage. Genuine matchless compassion is like this. If you generate it in your mind, then all the other positive qualities will follow without having to cultivate them separately. This is how matchless compassion is the root of all the Mahāyāna Dharma.

We learn this, also, from the great Ācārya Candrakīrti who wrote the famous text called *Madhyamakāvatāra*. It was the custom for authors to pay homage at the beginning of the text, and typically they paid homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, or to Ārya Mañjuśrī, the manifestation of all the wisdom of the buddhas. Candrakīrti did something different. He paid homage to great compassion, saying that all of the four kinds of noble beings arise from this matchless compassion. In the homage, he said that śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas achieved those results from practicing the Buddha's teachings, but buddhas arise from bodhisattvas. Without becoming a bodhisattva, it is not possible to become a buddha. Bodhisattvas arise when ordinary beings possess the three causes.

These are matchless compassion, bodhicitta, and nondual wisdom. Out of these three, the root cause is matchless compassion. This is because we cannot develop bodhicitta without first developing matchless compassion. With matchless compassion and bodhicitta, we can attain nondual wisdom. With these causes, we can become bodhisattvas, and then, by becoming bodhisattvas, we can become buddhas.

Again, matchless compassion is the root of all the Mahāyāna Dharma. Without it, it will be impossible to have a genuine practice of the six perfections. Without matchless compassion, it is also not possible to practice the stages of creation and completion in the Vajrayāna. Only with matchless compassion are all the other practices of the Mahāyāna Dharma genuine practices. This is why loving-kindness and compassion and bodhicitta are so important. It is necessary to have all these. Loving-kindness means wishing for the benefit and happiness of sentient beings, and compassion means wanting to rescue them from the harmful actions that bring suffering and from the causes of these actions.

How to Practice

If we wish to practice matchless compassion, we should first sit in a place conducive to its cultivation. This means finding a secluded place, but *secluded* doesn't just mean physical seclusion. The main thing is to have mental seclusion, which is freedom from distraction and negative thoughts. Then, once we are in a conducive place, we should sit in the proper position and do the refuge and bodhicitta practice. Virūpa says that, next, we should practice self-creation in the form of the deity that we practice and to visualize one's own guru seated upon one's head. However, unless you have received an empowerment to do such Vajrayāna practices, you can skip this part.

Then, we begin by visualizing a person who has done some heinous crime against us or against others. We should visualize them and generate compassion towards them, remembering why we should generate this compassion. Sometimes when a criminal is killed or sentenced to death, people feel happy about that, but this is not right. Those who celebrate this are engaging in serious non-virtue. Those who rejoice in killing actually have the same

fault as if they themselves had directly performed the act or had hired someone to do it. All three of these bring the fault of killing upon oneself. Therefore, we should not rejoice when a criminal is killed or sentenced to death, and we should generate compassion instead—matchless compassion towards all sentient beings, including this person.

We may not be able to save beings physically, but mentally we should always extend compassion without any discrimination, no matter how bad the other being is. "All sentient beings" doesn't only mean good people, it means all sentient beings whether they are good or bad, and even those who have committed heinous crimes. This is what you should have in mind when we say, "May all sentient beings be free from suffering and the cause of suffering."

Furthermore, it is not enough to recite these words. We should have their true meaning in our minds and we should try to apply this meaning in our daily lives so that we can make progress on the Buddhist path. Just reciting such beautiful words without the support of one's mind, without proper visualization, and without putting the words into action will not accomplish the progress that we want. Even if we recite these lines millions and millions of times for millions of years, we will not make any progress on the path unless we recite the lines genuinely and meaningfully so that they can make an impact on our minds.

Real progress comes from genuine practice, which is fundamentally mental and not physical. Without the support of the mind, there will be no progress on the path because the Buddhist path is not an external path. Only our minds can follow the Buddhist path, and a mind full of hatred or jealousy or other negative emotions will not make any progress. The only mind that can follow the Buddhist path is one that generates matchless compassion and the other good qualities that come with it. If you practice this way, you can make great progress on the path and eventually gain liberation and the state of perfect enlightenment.

Similarly, being on the right path is not determined by your physical appearance or by outer signs of mundane progress. It is not determined by your house, what kind of car you drive, whether you wear clothes from a nice brand, or the quality of the food you eat. These have nothing to do with being on the right path. The right path means having inner qualities, and wearing poor clothes or eating very simple foods do not indicate that you are not on the right path.

Milarepa and other great practitioners did not have good clothes to wear or good food to eat. Sometimes, when people see these great practitioners and how they live so meagerly, they feel compassion towards them because of it. But they don't need to worry. These practitioners are on the right track and making great

progress on the path. In fact, things should be the other way around. These people should be worried for themselves because by focusing on outward things, they are not meeting with true Dharma. Their compassion is misguided, and genuine compassion is actually flowing in the other direction: the great practitioners are extending genuine compassion towards *them*.

So with a single-pointed mind, we should recite, "Poor them, who cause harm to me." [2] This means we are extending compassion towards those who harm us. These beings should not be the objects of our revenge or hatred, but of our compassion. We should recite this many times—one hundred or fifty or twenty-one times. As I said, it is important that we do more than merely recite the words. We should be mindful of the meaning and maintain the visualization. Only if we do the practice in this way will it be beneficial. We should generate compassion flowing directly toward them.

Next, we should think about how these people who have committed harmful action towards us were our own mothers in the past. Thinking about this, we should generate or extend our compassion with the recitation, "Poor them! How worthy of compassion this person is!" We should recite these two alternately. On the one hand, we should extend compassion to them, flowing directly. On

the other hand, we should extend compassion by remembering that these beings who harm us now have been our mothers and, therefore, they are worthy of our compassion.

They have been our own mothers not only once or two times, but many times—an infinite number of times. Each time that they have been our mothers, they have guided us and looked after us. Not only that, they gave us our very precious bodies. Therefore, thinking this way, we should generate compassion towards them again and again.

At the moment, our minds are under the control of mental afflictions and compassion will not come by itself. We need to put effort into generating compassion through practice. Matchless compassion is not something that you can buy from a store or borrow from someone. A master with matchless compassion cannot share his compassion with you or transfer it mentally. They can help us generate it through teachings and help us with training, but the main cause must come from one's own side. You must put your own effort into it.

Our dear mothers have given us so much. We should generate real compassion to all of our past mothers, even though they have now changed their bodies and have been reborn in different lives and different surroundings. Sometimes, they see us as their enemy

rather than as their own children because they do not have control of their minds. They are like crazy persons, and because of this they have harmed the beings who are their own children.

Our response to this, from our side, should be to recognize that they are our own past mothers. We should reflect on this and generate matchless compassion again and again. We should remember that the harmful actions that they perform will cause them to suffer in the future, even to experience the greatest of sufferings in the hell realm. The suffering that they will experience is immense. Once someone finds themselves reborn in the hell realm, they will be there for a very long time.

We should focus on these two points again and again, alternating between generating a direct flow of compassion to them and thinking that they have been our mothers. We should generate compassion single-pointedly and from the depth of our hearts, until tears come from our eyes, or other signs arise.

Then, we should gradually extend our compassion towards all sentient beings, and we should think that for their sake, we wish to attain buddhahood. We should visualize all the sentient beings that are performing harmful actions and visualize that they will attain

buddhahood. Finally, we should meditate on nondual wisdom or the ultimate view for as long as possible. At the end, before any other thoughts arise, we should make a proper dedication.

Bodhicitta

The cause of attaining buddhahood is bodhicitta, which has two aspects: relative and absolute bodhicitta. Absolute bodhicitta is the wisdom that is free from all extremes, or nondual wisdom. The first kind—relative bodhicitta—can be approached in different ways. Here, the text explains the practice of exchanging self and other.

Whenever your physical body experiences illness and the mind has severe anxiety or suffering, both of these—physical and mental suffering—can be pacified by taking them onto the path. For example, if for some reason you generate strong hatred, then you should think, "Through my own hatred, may all the hatred that arises in others, together with the result of that hatred, ripen upon me." Think that you take the hatred of others and its negative result upon yourself. Think that all of the mental afflictions of sentient beings and the resultant suffering are caused by selfish thoughts or self-cherishing thoughts, and think that all this will ripen onto you, instead of onto them. Think this even for the suffering of the hell realms, the suffering of the hungry ghosts, the suffering of animals, the suffering of demigods, the suffering of gods, and the suffering

of human beings. Think that upon the basis of your hatred, all their suffering and all other obstacles and unfavorable conditions may ripen on you. With your body, voice, and mind, try to recollect all the suffering of others and think that it should ripen on you. You should pray in this way single-pointedly for as long as possible—for one hour or two or three. This will be very helpful.

The practice of exchange of self and other (or self-exchange) is very important. In fact, without it, attaining buddhahood is impossible. Śāntideva says this in the *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra*. He says that we cannot gain real happiness, the ultimate happiness of buddhahood, without the exchange of self and other. We should do this practice until the mental afflictions, or negative thoughts, are pacified, and until our physical suffering, pain, and illness are pacified.

You should do this practice for a long time, reciting, "May all the suffering of others ripen upon me." Then, when you have finished, think that the two heaps of merit and wisdom, all one's positive virtues, issue forth from your heart like rays of light and they go out to touch all beings. Imagine that this places all beings on the stage of the deities or in the state of perfect buddhahood. Then, again, you should meditate by settling the mind in the ultimate view which is beyond any extreme. Finally, before thoughts arise, you should do a proper dedication.

As beginners, we should work on this practice. Once we are familiar with it, we can work with all kinds of fears and suffering, or whatever they are, whether they are gross or subtle. And with single pointedness, we should recite, "May all obtain happiness by my virtue." You can find the proper translation and recite it in other languages. Also, you can wish that your virtues and other good qualities may ripen onto others so that they may have uncontaminated bliss. ("May my body, wealth, and virtues ripen upon all sentient beings, and may all of them attain uncontaminated happiness.") These two are essentially the same, but one is longer and the other shorter. At the end, just as before, think that beings are placed on the stage of buddhahood and do the dedication.

By relative bodhicitta, you will be able to pacify conceptual thoughts and mental afflictions and liberate beings from sickness and evil spirits. You will be able to benefit sentient beings and magnetize them. Eventually, through relative bodhicitta, you can attain the saṃbhogakāya and the nirmāṇakāya of a buddha so that you can accomplish the excellent purpose of others. Through ultimate bodhicitta, you can attain the excellent siddhi of Mahāmudrā, or the dharmakāya.

If these causes and conditions meet together through your practice, different signs will arise as a result—physical, verbal, and mental. The mind will be freed from dualistic thought and will be

able to remain in the practice of calm abiding or samatha. Also, insight wisdom will arise in one's mental continuum. This is called the moment of self-awareness of primordial wisdom. This moment rests in the nature of the five wisdoms. The emptiness part is non-dual dharmakāya, or nonconceptual dharmakāya. Self-awareness is the saṃbhogakāya. Clarity is the nirmāṇakāya. The inseparability of these three is the svabhāvikakāya, and this itself, which is free from all the extremes, is the wisdom of the dharmadhātu. Realizing the emptiness of self is mirror-like wisdom. Self-awareness is the wisdom of discrimination, or discriminatory awareness. Clarity by itself is the wisdom of accomplishment. And the non-differentiation of these is the wisdom of equality.

Conclusion

Matchless compassion is important in the beginning, middle, and end of the Mahāyāna path. In the beginning, it is like a seed that we plant in fertile ground. In the middle, it is like water and fertilizer that help the seed grow. At the end, it is the ripening stage of the crop. In this way, matchless compassion is important when we enter the Mayahana path, when we are on the path, and at the end, when we attain buddhahood. Buddhas still need matchless compassion. In fact, buddhas have the highest level of matchless compassion.

With this, I conclude my short teaching. To conclude, we should dedicate all our merits to the attainment of buddhahood for the sake of all beings. We should especially dedicate all our merits to our root gurus: that they may have good health, long life, and that they will turn the wheel of Dharma far and wide and forever.

Editorial Notes

[1] His Holiness recited the Tibetan verses. The English translation here is from [[Freeing the Heart and Mind]], Vol. 1. Wisdom Publications, 2011.

[2] His Holiness gives these lines in Tibetan. The translations here are from Freeing the Heart and Mind, Vol. 1. Wisdom Publications, 2011.



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.

"The Sakya Tradition"—Delivering the Precious Sakya Teachings Accurately and Entirely in Your Native Languages

https://sakyatradition.org

2026©All Rights Reserved