



# Living a Virtuous Worldly Life According to the Dharma

H.H. the Sakya Trichen (the 41<sup>st</sup> Sakya Trizin)



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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.

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# How to Live a Worldly Life According to the Dharma

**T**oday I am going to talk about a text composed by Drogön Chögyal Phagpa (1235–1280) who went to China and Mongolia. In fact, he was one of the pioneers who first spread the Buddhadharma, especially the Vajrayāna teachings, to China and Mongolia. The text is known as *The Advice to the Prince of the Mongol Empire, Prince Gibek Timur*. The title of the book is *A Garland of Jewels*.

I feel that this text is very important. It has three chapters.

## How to Live a Worldly Life According to the Dharma

The majority of us are still living a worldly life. Everyone, of course, wants to have a good life—one in which the individual is happy and is also able to make others happy by creating a happy atmosphere. However, to achieve this is difficult. Therefore, we need teachings and guidance. Thus, Drogön Chögyal Phagpa gave these teachings.

The first chapter of this text is about how to live a worldly life according to the Dharma. This is very important for everyone; I feel that to become a good spiritual practitioner, first we each have to become a good person. Without being good people, we cannot become good spiritual practitioners. So, first of all, whichever religion we are following, we have to be good people. Being a good person, in a sense, means to have a healthy life, and also a very healthy mind, so that one can live long, one can think clearly, and one can make peace and happiness with oneself and with others.

On the basis of that, then we can choose whatever religion or spiritual practice that we need. There are many religions in the world. And I believe that every major religion has its own way and own beauty to help mankind. It is necessary to have a variety of spiritual traditions because there is not one medicine that cures all diseases. In order to cure different diseases, we need different medicines. Therefore, the variety of spiritual practices is very important. For some people, Buddhism is very suitable. For some people, Christianity is more suitable. For some people, Hinduism is more suitable. For some people, Islam is more suitable. So whatever religious or spiritual practice one follows, first one has to become a good person.

What should we do to become a good person? For that, the first chapter of this text has nine parts that address this.

*1. One should not be arrogant and prideful.*

When one has wealth, power, education, and strength, one tends to have arrogance and pride. For this, Chögyal Phagpa said that one should never have pride because everything is impermanent. There is no point to be proud because whatever glorious position one is upholding, it is not permanent. Everything is impermanent. As the Buddha said, “All compounded things are impermanent.”

All compounded things have the four endings.

*The end of gathering is separation.*

*The end of accumulation is exhaustion.*

*The end of height is to fall down.*

*The end of birth is death.*

Wherever we gather, we do not remain forever. Hence the end of gathering is separation.

No matter how much we accumulate, nothing lasts forever. Instead at the end, it exhausts.

Just like no matter how high birds fly in the sky, eventually they will have to land on the ground. Likewise, no matter how high our position is or our power reaches, eventually we have to fall down.

Lastly, the end of birth is death. When one is born, one will die one day.

Even for the things that we presume are very stable and vast, such as ocean, sun, moon, Mount Sumeru, and so on, and even though they are very huge and very vast, one day they will disappear. As we see, for example, huge mountains also disappear eventually after thousands and millions of years. So, too, with the body, which is very fragile and easy to lose, just like water bubbles. Water bubbles are created but then immediately burst. So, there is no point in being arrogant.

*2. One should not be timid.*

When we lose everything such as wealth and power, then we might become very timid. We may think, “Now I cannot do anything. I am the worst one.” We feel very down and depressed. Chögyal Phagpa said that is wrong. There are many worse states than this, for example, the hell realm, hungry ghost realm, and animal realm. Even among human beings, there are many who are in a much worse situation than us. Compared with them, we are in a much better state. Therefore, one should not be timid. One has to follow the middle path—one should not be arrogant, but at the same time one should not be timid.

*3. One should pay back the kindness of others.*

Our present body came from our parents. Without the care and love from our parents, we cannot survive. We are alive today as a human being is due to the kindness of our parents. Due to the kindness of our teachers and masters, we are educated and therefore we can read, write, think, and move around as human beings. Therefore, we must remember their kindness and try to pay back their kindness.

*4. One should respect rulers and leaders.*

In the olden time, every country was ruled by kings, queens, and so on. In other words, each country is ruled by leaders. Due to their skills and activities, the country is able to carry on. Therefore, one must respect rulers or leaders.

*5. One must look after the poor.*

The poor ones here are referred to those who are in desperation, destitute, being sick, powerless, who are unable to look after themselves, or in poor conditions. We must think about them and try to help whenever we can.

*6. One must expand one's kingdom through skillful means.*

Since this teaching is given to a prince who is ruling a country, the sixth and seventh pieces of advice are specifically for country leaders.

In the olden times, rulers were considered as the universal emperors who conquered other parts of the land to expand their kingdoms. There were different levels of universal emperors, namely the gold emperors, silver emperors, copper emperors, and metal emperors, depending on the size of their kingdom. As such, it was viewed that if the kingdom was larger, it was greater. Therefore, Chögyal Phagpa advised those country rulers to expand their lands through skillful means.

*7. One rules the country according to the Dharma.*

The seventh piece of advice is to rule the country according to the Dharma. This actually has many different parts. But it is also about the law. It says that there is no one who has all the possible qualities, but there is no one who has all the faults, too. Even a man who has many faults also has some qualities. Even the ones who have many qualities also have some faults. So, we must examine whether there is a greater amount of good qualities or of faults. If a ruler has more good qualities and fewer faults, then that is a good person. If one has fewer good qualities but more faults, then the person must abandon their faults.

Moreover, as the ruler or the king of a country, one has to look after all its citizens equally. There are many different kinds of people; some are good people while some are bad people. So, for good people who follow the rules of the country or do good works

for the country, we must give them rewards according to the good works they have done. If they have done a lot, then we have to give greater awards. Likewise, if they have done medium or smaller works, then they should receive smaller rewards.

Furthermore, there are bad people who do not follow the rules of the country or who disrupt the country, and they have to be punished. Chögyal Phagpa offers the good advice that the punishment given should not be due to anger or hatred. Instead, it should be given out of a good heart. For example, when a doctor prescribes injections and perform surgeries on sick people, he or she is treating them not out of a wish to hurt them, but in the hope to cure their disease. Similarly, bad people are given punishments such as scolding or being prosecuted, not because we want to create pain or suffering for them. Rather, punishments are given with the intention to help them so that they will become better people, so that they will follow the right path and do the right things.

In addition, Chögyal Phagpa is adamantly against capital punishment. He gave an analogy to elaborate this: if one perceives dirty clothes as dirty and therefore wants to burn them, then those clothes will not be useable again. However, if they are washed, then one can use them for many purposes. Likewise, if we kill a person just because he or she is bad, then that person's life will be finished. But if they are given treatment—punishment

and advice—they, too, can become a good person. For example, in ancient times, Aṅgulimāla and Ajātaśatru committed very heavy negative deeds, yet, due to the Dharma teachings given to them, they became great leaders. Therefore, bad people can become good people. So, one must make great effort to do so; for this reason, as leaders one should rule the whole country according to the Dharma.

*8. One should acquire wealth through good means.*

Actually, the universe is divided into two main parts: the lower realms and the higher realms. The lower realms are the hell realm, hungry ghost realm, and animal realm. The higher realms are the human realm, demigod realm, and god realm. Beings in the higher realms have seven qualities: good birth, beautiful form, good health, wisdom, power, wealth, and long life. Among these qualities, wealth is important in worldly life. Chögyal Phagpa further classified wealth into four types.

The first type of wealth is like relatives who help and benefit us. Such wealth is considered as “good wealth.” For example, due to one’s good karma accumulated in previous lives, one does not need to go through hardship to acquire wealth in this life. And then, after wealth is acquired, one uses it to make offerings, give it to the poor, use it on oneself or on relatives and friends.

Therefore everybody benefits. Thus, such wealth is like relatives or friends who can benefit us.

The second type of wealth is like gaining enemies. Due to the lack of merit, one has to acquire wealth with tremendous efforts, hardships, and difficulties. Furthermore, even after acquiring wealth, one becomes the cause of the fighting. Even among one's siblings, because of fighting for wealth, one becomes their enemies. So, this kind of wealth becomes the source of quarrels and fighting. Hence this type of wealth is like gaining enemies.

The third type of wealth is like actual wealth, which is when one acquires it using whatever means, and then after that uses it for general purposes. It is just wealth as wealth.

The fourth type of wealth is "wasted wealth." Some people make a lot of efforts to acquire wealth. Yet after acquiring it, one does not dare to spend on offerings, neither giving it for charity purpose nor using it for oneself or relatives. In other words, one simply accumulates wealth the same way that bees accumulate honey. Bees make a lot of efforts to accumulate so much honey and then it is taken and consumed by humans. Likewise, such wealth is of the same type; it is "wasted wealth."

To summarize, whatever wealth we are acquiring, we must acquire it by way of "good wealth."

*9. Whatever work one is embarking upon, one should examine, discuss, and then do the work.*

Foolish people will first do the work and then only examine it later on. This is a foolish way of doing things. The wise way of doing things is that first we have to examine the plan, discuss it, then make the decision, and do the work. Of course, all the work cannot be accomplished. Some works can be accomplished. Some works cannot be accomplished. Even if we cannot accomplish it, if we have examined it beforehand, if we have discussed and made decisions carefully, then we have no regret of not examining it. But if we first do the work, and then see the results, and then later regret that the plan was not examined at the start, this is a foolish way.

These are the general outlines of the nine subjects described in the first chapter of the text.

## Hīnayāna Teachings

**C**högyal Phagpa said that even if one lives a worldly life in a decent way that is, according to the Dharma ways that benefit oneself, make others happy, and create a peaceful and harmonious environment, unless one has a religion, one cannot accomplish liberation or achieve a better next life as goals. Therefore, having a religion and spiritual practice is very important.

This important point was discussed very clearly in the root text by Chögyal Phagpa. However, in the long commentary of this root text given by Jamgön Anye Shyap, who was the twenty-seventh throne holder of the Sakya lineage, a very interesting point was mentioned. Some Tibetan texts in our Sakya lineage mention philosophies associated with Hinduism. This is because Buddhism and Hinduism reached Tibet from India together, and as a result we have learned a great deal about different schools of Hinduism. There was very little mention of other religions, such as Christianity and Islam. Yet in this commentary, the existence of different religions is clearly mentioned, although slightly different names are used. I think this commentary is very important

because many of the Hindu philosophies that were mentioned in many texts no longer exist. In this present day, Christianity and Islam are among the most important religions in the world. As such it is appropriate for us to know about these different religions and their teachings. This commentary is interesting as it was one of the few Tibetan texts that mentions Christianity, although not in detail.

As previously mentioned, I believe every religion has its own role to play to help mankind. Therefore, followers of every religion must try to get to know each other; we must share our experience and we must help each other. Together we must make a united effort for a better world.

Out of many different religions, the text mentions Buddhism, beginning with the Hīnayāna tradition. The majority of the Buddha's followers are Hīnayāna followers, since most people are inclined to this path. In the Hīnayāna tradition, as a Buddhist, the first step is to go for refuge. Without going for refuge, one cannot become a Buddhist. Being born into a Buddhist family does not mean one is a Buddhist. Only when one has gone for refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha, for the sake of liberation, does one become a Buddhist. Therefore, the second chapter of this text mentions going for refuge in detail. Going for refuge is actually the root of all Dharma, the preliminary practice of all the paths, and the foundation of all the vows. It differentiates Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

It is very important and essential to go for refuge in the Triple Gem—the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. For example, if one needs to go to an unknown country, first one needs a guide to rely on to show us the correct path. Similarly, we go for refuge in the Buddha as our guide because the Buddha has shown us the path of liberation.

After relying on the guide, we have to travel by ourselves—having a guide alone is not enough. While the guide shows us the path, we have to walk the path ourselves. So, the Dharma is the path. We have to practice the Dharma. Buddha helps all sentient beings not by performing miracles or by doing anything, but by giving the teachings—teaching and demonstrating what is right and the right approach and showing the path we should take. Hence by following the Buddha’s teachings, we can then attain liberation. Dharma is the path. And therefore, we go for refuge in the Dharma as our actual path.

Next, we go for refuge in the Saṅgha as our companion. Saṅgha means the holy community, who shares the same goal and is like our travel companion. If one takes a journey that is long and difficult, instead of travelling alone, it will be much more helpful if one has trusted companions.

So, in this way we go for refuge, and then we are all set to the path of liberation.

In the same chapter of *A Garland of Jewels*, the text also discusses

the four noble truths—the truth of suffering, the truth of cause, the truth of cessation, and the truth of path.

First, we must know suffering, which is the first noble truth—the truth of suffering. If we do not know suffering, we cannot discard and eliminate suffering. For example, if we are sick, first we need to know the nature of sickness. Without knowing the kind of sickness, we are not able to take any effective remedies or treatments. Therefore, one must know what is suffering, which can be categorized as the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and the suffering of the conditioned nature of all phenomena.

The second noble truth is the truth of cause. What is the cause of suffering? We have to discard and abandon the cause of suffering. Otherwise suffering will never end. For example, when one knows the exact nature of sickness, then one has to abstain from the cause of sickness. We have to abandon the cause of sickness, which is defilement. And this is the truth of cause.

The third truth is the truth of cessation. We all wish to recover from the sickness. Likewise, we wish to block and cease all sufferings permanently, and this is the truth of cessation.

And, to reach cessation, the fourth noble truth is the truth of path. Through this path, we are able to reach the goal—the cessation. In other words, the truth of cessation is where all sufferings permanently cease.

## Mahāyāna Teachings

**M**ahāyāna teachings are about bodhicitta. As Buddhists, we believe in rebirth. This current life is not the only birth that we have now. We have had innumerable lives before and we will also have innumerable lives in the future. This current life is just one of the innumerable lives. Life goes on just like a moving wheel; after turning one round, it does not simply stop but continues turning through another round. When this life stops, the next life will continue. It goes on and on. Therefore, every sentient being has actually been our very dear ones, such as our parents, relatives, and so on. But due to the change of life, we do not recognize each other; we perceive some people as our enemies, some as our friends, and some as indifferent to us. But, in reality, every sentient being, without any exception, even if they are our most hated enemies, whether we know them now or not, whether they are near or far, irrespective of ones that are known, every sentient being has actually been our very dear mother and father, and so on. So, we have to realize this.

We have to think about them. We cannot abandon them. Even on a worldly level, too; for example, if our most beloved persons like our parents, siblings, spouse, and children are in a very difficult place or in great suffering, yet we are in a safe and happy place, then if we have a good heart, we will not feel happy. We would rather go where our loved ones are suffering. Similarly, since all sentient beings have also been our very loved ones, despite not recognizing each other due to the change of life, and thus we have to think about how we can pay back their kindness, the ways in which we can benefit them. Every sentient being wishes to be fully free from suffering, and every sentient being wishes to accomplish happiness. For the sake of happiness, everyone is running one after another. But due to the lack of wisdom, due to ignorance, we are creating more and more causes of suffering, and more and more experiences of suffering. Therefore, this has to be corrected.

### *Loving-Kindness and Compassion*

So, how can we do that? We must generate loving-kindness, which means to make all sentient beings happy, and to be with the cause of happiness. We may develop this very genuine loving-kindness thought, yet when we look around, every sentient being is not happy, and every sentient being is actually suffering. Thus, wishing every sentient being to be free from suffering is

“compassion.” Due to having genuine loving-kindness and compassion, then how can we help all the sentient beings? However, at this moment, we as ordinary beings have no freedom and no choice, because we are totally bound to our karma and defilements. So, wherever the wind of karma blows, without a choice, one has to be there. So, we are not able to rescue sentient beings. Not only that, even the most powerful worldly deities, who have great miracles, or who have great powers, also cannot rescue sentient beings. Not only that, those who have already reached nirvana, such as śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, also do not have the full ability to rescue all sentient beings. Only the fully enlightened buddhas, who have eliminated all forms of obscurations and have accomplished every possible quality, can rescue countless sentient beings within a single moment. Therefore, as Mahāyāna practitioners, our goal is to accomplish the ultimate enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. In other words, the ultimate enlightenment is not just for oneself alone, but is for the sake of all sentient beings without any exceptions. And this is known as the “enlightenment mind.”

### *The Six Pāramitās*

In this way, we generate bodhicitta or the enlightenment mind. After creating the enlightenment mind, we create what we call “entering the enlightenment mind.” Entering the enlightenment

mind means, in order to accomplish buddhahood, we must follow the bodhisattva's way of life, like the six perfections or pāramitās: the perfection of generosity, the perfection of moral conduct, the perfection of patience, the perfection of endeavor, the perfection of meditation, and the perfection of wisdom. And wisdom is very important because the first five perfections are methods to accumulate merit while the sixth perfection is to accumulate wisdom. To make generosity a perfection, the practice has to be linked with wisdom. Without wisdom, it is not the perfection of generosity, it is merely generosity. But with wisdom, then the practice becomes the perfection of generosity. So, method and wisdom are like two wings. In order to fly in the sky, we need two wings. Similarly, with method and wisdom together, we can accomplish enlightenment.

### *The Five Paths and the Ten Bhūmis*

This chapter also talks about the five paths: the path of accumulation, the path of application, the path of seeing, the path of meditation, and the path of no-more-learning. Generally speaking, the paths can be categorized into the worldly path and the beyond-the-worldly path. The worldly path is the path of accumulation and the path of application. The path of accumulation is where one first accumulates merit when

one becomes a bodhisattva. After creating the enlightenment mind and taking the bodhisattva vow, one becomes a bodhisattva. In a sense, one is ensured to become a buddha. So, that is the path of accumulation. This path, of course, has three stages: the small, medium, and great paths of accumulation.

After that is the path of application, which joins between the two paths—the worldly path and the beyond-the-worldly path. Once one reaches the path of seeing, it is beyond-the-worldly path, where one sees the ultimate reality, the ultimate truth. Thus, it is known as “the path of seeing.” There are ten bhūmis in the bodhisattva path. The path of seeing is the first bhūmi.

The path of meditation comes next, comprising the remaining nine bhūmis. It is the path that increases one’s wisdom, one’s “seeing.” Although there is no difference between the path of seeing and the enlightenment of the path that we see, they are as different as a new moon and a full moon. Buddha is like the full moon while the path of seeing is like the new moon. However, one increases from the new moon stage. So, the path of meditation means one will increase wisdom and becomes a full moon that will eventually reach the eleventh bhūmi—buddhahood—the path of no-more-learning, according to the Mahāyāna teachings. At this stage, one does not need to learn anymore, hence the path of no-more-learning.

In summary, to attain full enlightenment, we need both method and wisdom. Without either one, one will not be able to accomplish both. For example, in order to walk on the road, we need both legs as well as eyes. If we only have legs, yet no eyes, we cannot see. If we have eyes, but no legs, we cannot walk. However, having both eyes to see and legs to walk together, we can then walk on the road. Likewise, both method and wisdom are like our eyes and legs, working as a pair. Method helps wisdom and wisdom helps method. With method and wisdom together, then one can accomplish perfect buddhahood.

-The End-





■ 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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