

Transcript of the teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on *The 37 Aspects of the Path to Enlightenment*

Chart on the Eight Categories and 70 Topics: Extract from *Basic Program Study Manual for Maitreya's Ornament of Clear Realizations, Chapter 4*, compiled by Emily Hsu and Kok Wai Cheong, revised by Sally Ong and Ven. Sangye Khadro; an FPMT Masters Program Materials Project, edition February 2010, © FPMT, Inc.

Lesson 3

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Introduction: The eight categories and seventy topics. The three knowers. The eight categories. The four applications. The perfection of wisdom explained. The basis, the path and the result. Exalted knower of all aspects—the ten topics.

INTRODUCTION—THE EIGHT CATEGORIES & 70 TOPICS

I am going to give a brief introduction to the eight categories and the seventy topics.

How did the eight categories come about? The eight categories are the subject matter of a text called the *Ornament of Clear Realizations (Abhisamayalamkara)* composed by Maitreya. In this text, there are eight chapters and the eight categories are the subject matter of these eight chapters.

The Buddha taught the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* of which there are the extensive, middling and short versions. These are called the three mothers.

- The short *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* is contained in one volume.
- The middling *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* is contained in three volumes.
- The extensive *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* is contained in twelve volumes.

Collectively, these are known as the extensive, middling and short mothers, i.e., they are the mothers of the perfection of wisdom. In these sutras, there are eight chapters and the subject matter of these eight chapters is in turn classified into the eight categories.

The *Ornament of Clear Realizations* by Maitreya is a text that clarifies the meaning of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* to make it easier for beings to realize their subject matter.

In the opening verse of the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, Maitreya pays homage to the three knowers.

1. The exalted knower of all aspects

The first knower is called the exalted knower of all aspects. This is the wisdom truth body. With the wisdom truth body as the basis, there are two form bodies: the complete enjoyment body and the supreme emanation body. These two bodies manifest for the purpose of benefitting sentient beings by teaching them the Dharma, i.e., by turning the Wheel of Dharma. A buddha works for sentient beings through these form bodies. As

the wisdom truth body is the basis upon which these two form bodies arise, it is the empowering condition for the two form bodies.

What causes the supreme emanation body to turn the Wheel of Dharma for the disciples of the three lineages? The empowering condition that makes that happen is the exalted knower of all aspects (*rnam mkhyen*). So the function of the exalted knower of all aspects is to act as the empowering condition for the manifestation of the form bodies that turn the Wheel of Dharma for the sentient beings.

2. *The knower of paths*

The knower of paths is the knower of a bodhisattva superior. The function of the knower of paths is that it allows the bodhisattva superior to accomplish the welfare and goals of all disciples of the three lineages.

The exalted knower of all aspects is able to completely fulfil the welfare, purposes and goals of the disciples of the three lineages. But prior to the achievement of the exalted knower of all aspects, one must have achieved the knower of paths, which is like a cause for the exalted knower of all aspects.

The knower of paths also functions to enable the bodhisattva superior to accomplish the welfare, goals and happiness of the disciples of the three lineages but it is the exalted knower of all aspects that is able to do this perfectly.

3. *The knower of bases*

The function of the knower of bases is to enable the hearers and solitary realisers to achieve the complete peace of nirvana or liberation.

Briefly, these are the functions of the three knowers—the exalted knower of all aspects, the knower of paths and the knower of bases.

By paying homage, praising and expressing the individual functions of these three knowers in the opening verse of the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, this causes disciples to generate faith and the aspiration to achieve the different goals of the persons of the three lineages.

In this context, there is an extensive discussion on the way faith is generated in the mind of followers. There are two kinds of followers in terms of their capacities, i.e., whether they are of dull faculties or sharp faculties. Respectively, they are also referred to as followers of faith—those trainees who generate faith simply by hearing this verse of homage and followers of doctrine (or Dharma)—those trainees who do not generate faith so easily. They want to think more deeply about things.

The eight categories

The eight categories consists of:

1. the three knowers:
 - the exalted knower of all aspects
 - the knower of paths
 - the knower of bases

2. the four applications
 - application in the complete aspects
 - peak application
 - serial application
 - momentary application
3. one result
 - resultant truth body

Why are there these eight categories?

- From the perspective of that which is to be achieved, there are the three knowers.
- The means of achieving them are the four applications.
- This is then followed by the result.

We are supposed to cultivate the three knowers. From the perspective of the path that cultivates them, there are the four applications. The cultivation of the path pertains to abandoning the two obscurations—the afflictive obscurations and the knowledge obscurations. This results in the achievement of the resultant truth body.

The four applications

In order to abandon the two obscurations, one must meditate on the aspects of the three knowers in a complete way.

- When one has yet to gain mastery over one's cultivation of the aspects of the three exalted knowers, this is the application in the complete aspects.
- The meditation that cultivates fully the aspects of the three exalted knowers is the peak application.
- Then there is the application that must precede the achievement of the resultant truth body. This application must be able to meditate on all aspects of the three exalted knowers in a single moment. This means that all the objects of meditation must arise effortlessly in the mind of the bodhisattva. For example, when the bodhisattva is thinking about impermanence, in the shortest moment of time, he is also able to cultivate all the aspects of the three exalted knowers. This is momentary application.
- But before one cultivates all aspects of the three exalted knowers in a single moment, one must be able to cultivate the individual aspects of the three exalted knowers serially. This is serial application.

To summarise:

- First, when one has not gained any mastery yet, that is application in the complete aspects.
- After one has gained mastery, this is peak application.
- When one is meditating on the aspects of the three exalted knowers to gain steadiness, this is serial application.
- After one has achieved such steadiness, this is momentary application.

By cultivating these four applications at the time of the path, then one achieves the resultant truth body.

It is stated in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, “The perfection of wisdom is perfectly explained by the eight categories.” What follows is a short explanation of what the

perfection of wisdom is exactly.

The perfection of wisdom explained

According to the Autonomy Middle Way School (AMWS) and the philosophical views below that, the perfection of wisdom exists only on the buddha ground because it is a perfection. This means that it can only be achieved on the buddha ground.

However, the Prasangikas, the proponents of the Consequence Middle Way School (CMWS), posit that the perfection of wisdom exists during the time of training also. The word “perfection” should be understood to mean not only the culmination of wisdom itself but also the process of progressing towards that perfection. Therefore, it exists at the time of the path.

The *Ornament of Clear Realizations* is explained from the philosophical viewpoint of the Yogic Autonomy Middle Way School (YAMWS). As such, the perfection of wisdom does not exist at the time of the path as it only exists on the buddha ground.

If the perfection of wisdom is explained from the perspective of its name, etymologically, it can be divided into four:

1. the natural perfection of wisdom
2. the scriptural perfection of wisdom
3. the path perfection of wisdom
4. the resultant perfection of wisdom

~ *Natural perfection of wisdom*

In our earlier discussion about the verse from the *Vajra Cutter Sutra* starting with “the star, ...,” there was a brief description of the two levels of reality, the two truths, i.e., the conventional truth and the ultimate truth. The natural perfection of wisdom refers to the ultimate truth, the deepest level of reality of each and everything that exists.

The natural perfection of wisdom is also the mind of clear light, the tathagata essence.

- From the perspective of sutra, the clear light nature of the mind, the natural perfection of wisdom, is the basis Mahamudra.
- From the tantric perspective, the basis Mahamudra is the extremely subtle mind of clear light that arises after the dissolution of the winds supporting the four elements and after the dissolution of the minds of white appearance, red increase and black near-attainment. To this mind of clear light that manifests at the time of death, nothing appears except vacuity. This comes about through a complete subsidence of all duality. You can also call this the clear light of death. This is the basis Mahamudra.

~ *Scriptural perfection of wisdom*

The scriptural perfection of wisdom has the natural perfection of wisdom as its subject matter. In other words, the main subject matter expressed by the scriptural perfection of wisdom is emptiness.

~ *Path perfection of wisdom*

The mind that realizes this emptiness is the path perfection of wisdom. I am explaining roughly the meaning of the path perfection of wisdom. Generally speaking, it is the mind

realizing emptiness but it is not only that. If we were to analyse this more deeply, in order to be a path perfection of wisdom, it is not sufficient for it just to be a mind realizing emptiness. It has to be a mind realizing emptiness that is *conjoined* with the mind generation, i.e., bodhicitta.

~ *Resultant perfection of wisdom*

The resultant perfection of wisdom is the exalted knower of all aspects. At the time of the result, the exalted knower of all aspects is the resultant perfection of wisdom. But in order to have that result, we need to have the path that brings it about. This is the path perfection of wisdom.

The basis, the path and the result

- The basis for generating that path perfection of wisdom is because the ultimate truth, the ultimate nature of reality, points to how things are in reality. This is why there is the natural perfection of wisdom.
- Because this basis exists, therefore, we can have the path that realizes it—the path perfection of wisdom.
- By depending on that path, we then actualize the result, the resultant perfection of wisdom.

This is why there are the basis, the path and the result.

What about the path Mahamudra from the tantric perspective? I would think that through the force of meditation, one causes the winds supporting the four elements to dissolve. Together with the dissolution of the minds of white appearance, red increase and black near-attainment, this culminates in the extremely subtle mind. At the time of death, if one is able to mix that mind with death, perhaps that is the path Mahamudra. I am not sure as to whether this extremely subtle mind needs to realize emptiness in order to be a path Mahamudra. This is something you need to think about.

The natural perfection of wisdom is the emptiness of the mind, i.e., it is empty of inherent existence. This deepest nature of the mind is not newly fabricated nor did it arise before the mind itself. For as long as the mind was in existence, the emptiness of inherent existence of the mind has always been one with the mind.

Although this is the case, as we have yet to realize the emptiness of our mind, therefore, we have been circling in cyclic existence up to now. But comes the time when we realize the empty nature of our mind, along with the empty nature of all phenomena, this very realization is achieved through the path perfection of wisdom. When the path perfection of wisdom arises in our mind, this is when the process of achieving permanent, everlasting happiness, eradicating the obscurations and achieving full enlightenment starts.

In order to develop this path perfection of wisdom in us, we have to depend on the scriptural perfection of wisdom. By engaging in the threefold processes of hearing, reflecting and meditating on the subject matter that is expressed by the scriptural perfection of wisdom, then one day, we will be able to generate the path perfection of wisdom. Then we will be able to eradicate our obscurations and achieve the resultant perfection of wisdom. As such, studying and critically analyzing the subject matter of the

scriptural perfection of wisdom become so very important.

Je Rinpoche Lama Tsongkhapa stated very clearly that the very heart, the essence of the entire Buddhadharma, lies in the subject matter of the scriptural perfection of wisdom, i.e., emptiness. It is important that we see for ourselves that this is the case.

In the life story of Lama Tsongkhapa, during the earlier part of his life, he showed the aspect of not realizing emptiness. He asked Manjushri what he needed to do in order to see the ultimate nature of reality, to realize things as they are. Manjushri told him, “In order for you to see the ultimate nature of reality, to realize things as they are, you need to do three things:

1. Work hard at accumulating merit and purifying the mind of negativities and obscurations.
2. Make heartfelt single-pointed request over and over again to the guru who is inseparable from one’s meditational deity.
3. Study and engage in listening, reflecting and meditating on the great treatises.”

Lama Tsongkhapa took these instructions to heart. He engaged in practice, studied and meditated, putting in much effort and bearing great hardships. By depending on these three conditions, there came the day when he saw reality as it is, experiencing it for himself. It was at that time that he developed a tremendous, unshakeable, irreversible faith in and devotion towards the Buddha. He saw that the Buddha was very special and unparalleled. Based on that experience, he composed *Dependent Arising—A Praise of the Buddha*.

In that composition, he said,

Due to the kindness of my lamas,
I have met the teachings of the greatest of teachers.
I dedicate this virtue, therefore, for every living being
To be nourished by true spiritual friends.

In order to see for ourselves how unparalleled and unrivalled the Buddha’s teachings are and that they are truly in a class of their own, it all comes down to realizing the ultimate nature of reality. This is the hallmark of the entire Buddhadharma. Therefore, we must understand the basis, the presentation of reality. In particular, we have to understand and generate a decisive conviction in the natural perfection of wisdom and in the path perfection of wisdom. Dependent on that, the resultant perfection of wisdom will come about. Only then can we taste the distinctive flavour of the Buddhadharma.

EXALTED KNOWER OF ALL ASPECTS

There are ten topics that illustrate the exalted knower of all aspects through a presentation of object and subject and a presentation of cause and effect.

Definiendum	Definition	Boundary	No. of topics	Topics (Seventy topics)
Exalted Knower of all Aspects	A fully developed exalted wisdom directly realizing	Only on the buddha	10	1. Mind generation 2. Precepts 3. Four branches of definite

Definiendum	Definition	Boundary	No. of topics	Topics (Seventy topics)
	the ten topics, mind generation and so forth.	ground		discrimination 4. Naturally abiding lineage, the basis of Mahayana achieving 5. Observed objects of Mahayana achieving 6. Object of intent 7. Achieving through armour 8. Achieving through engagement 9. Achieving through the collections 10. Definitely issuing achieving

Khen Rinpoche: When I studied in the monastery, we had to memorize this text by heart. Everything—how many of this and how many of that. I was around 18 or 19.

If you really want to learn and discuss this topic, then you have to memorize it. If you don't memorize, of course, there is nothing to discuss. When you don't even know how to say the words, what is there to discuss? That's why in the monastery we memorize all these texts. When we go to debate, we are not allowed to carry any texts. We go empty-handed. We have to ask questions. We have to say the words. If we have nothing to say, then we just sit down there. Then you don't learn anything. In the monastery, it is like that. They are trained to memorize everything. This is how you improve your memory. If someone tells you, "Oh, you don't know anything!" then you say, "I will show you tomorrow." It is very competitive but it helps you to improve.

It is not like that here. I try to explain as much as possible, as briefly as possible. But I am not sure how much you can absorb. I will not be talking so much on this topic. This is why this module is quite short. If I were to explain everything, it would go up to the level of the Master's Program. Now it is just the Basic Program so I am just giving you some idea of this subject.

The ten topics

1. Mind generation

Why is mind generation the first topic in the presentation of the seventy topics? It is to show that the special trainees or disciples of this text, the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, must possess this particular quality. In the text, there is a long discussion about the nature of mind generation, starting with its definition and divisions—the aspirational mind generation and engaged mind generation. For example, there is the explanation of the 22 types of mind generation by way of simile, quoting sources from various sutras.

The main object of attainment of these special trainees of the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* who possess the mind generation is the exalted knower of all aspects. In order for these trainees to achieve the exalted knower of all aspects, they need to listen to the instructions for achieving the exalted knower of all aspects. Therefore, after mind generation, there is the topic of precepts.

2. Precepts

When these precepts are divided by the way of their mode of instructions, there are ten

divisions:

- The first are called the precepts that instruct on achievings, their own entity. This talks about the importance of understanding the basis, the two truths that constitute reality.
- The second are the precepts that instruct on the object of observation, the four noble truths.
- The third are the precepts that instruct on the bases of reliance, the Three Jewels. Why does this come after the four noble truths? By knowing what constitutes reality, one comes to truly know what the four noble truths are. It is only after knowing the four noble truths well that one can talk about the Three Jewels, the objects of reliance. This is really important.

One has to have a real understanding of and conviction in what constitutes reality—both the superficial level and the deeper level, i.e., the two truths. On the basis of the two truths, then one talks about the four noble truths in which there is also a discussion of the paths. After understanding the four noble truths well, only then can one understand fully what the Three Jewels, our objects of refuge and reliance, really are. This order of looking at things is really important.

Without knowing the four noble truths well, whatever understanding we may have of the Three Jewels is mere lip service. In order to know the reasons why we are taking refuge in the Three Jewels, we have to know well what the four noble truths are.

The remaining precepts are taught in order to be able to perfectly accomplish the practice.

After having sorted out what reality is, the four noble truths and the Three Jewels, in order to achieve the object of attainment by engaging in the practice perfectly, we have to overcome the discordant factor of laziness. There are three kinds of laziness: the laziness of procrastination, the laziness of attraction to meaningless activities and the laziness of inadequacy. The next three precepts are to overcome these three types of laziness.

- The fourth are the precepts that instruct on effort in non-clinging.
- The fifth are the precepts that instruct on tireless effort.
- The sixth are the precepts that instruct on the effort that thoroughly upholds the path.
- In order to explain how exalted the practice can become, the seventh precept is the precepts that instruct on the five eyes.
- In order to fully complete all the qualities of the practice, there are the precepts that instruct on the six clairvoyances.
- In order to instruct on achieving the final results of the training, then there are the precepts that instruct on the path of seeing and the precepts that instruct on the path of meditation.

To re-cap, the ten precepts are:

1. the precepts that instruct on achievings
2. the precepts that instruct on the object of observation

3. the precepts that instruct on the reliance
4. the precepts that instruct on effort in non-clinging
5. the precepts that instruct on tireless effort
6. the precepts that instruct on the effort that thoroughly upholds the path
7. the precepts that instruct on the five eyes
8. the precepts that instruct on the six clairvoyances
9. the precepts that instruct on the path of seeing
10. the precepts that instruct on the path of meditation

Studying these precepts is not simply a matter of listing down their names, looking at the presentation of each precept, their respective definitions and so forth. This is why there is a very extensive presentation of the two truths followed by a very extensive presentation of what the four noble truths are. Then there is a very extensive presentation of what exactly the Three Jewels—the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha—are. This is similar to the explanation of the Three Jewels in the module on the *Tathagata Essence*. Then there are the discussions on the special methods to achieve the goal, such as the different kinds of clairvoyances. In order to work for the benefit of others, one needs abilities such as clairvoyance and so forth. This is why there is the presentation of the five eyes and six clairvoyances.

3. *Four branches of definite discrimination*

The branches of definite discrimination is the Mahayana path of preparation. By listening to the precepts, one will come to achieve the branches of definite discrimination. On the basis of knowing that there are four divisions of the Mahayana path of preparation—heat, peak, forbearance and supreme mundane qualities—there is an extensive discussion of how the manifestation of the apprehended and apprehender is overcome as one progresses through the path of preparation.

4. *Naturally abiding lineage, the basis of Mahayana achieving*

The fourth topic talks about the naturally abiding lineage, the basis of Mahayana achieving, of which there are four (listed as topics 7—10):

- achieving through armour
- achieving through engagement
- achieving through the collections
- definitely issuing achieving (or achieving through definite issuance)

These four achievings are performed with the naturally abiding lineage as their basis.

What is a Mahayana achieving? You should understand a Mahayana achieving to be a Mahayana path. In order for it to be a Mahayana path, it must rely on something. The basis of the Mahayana achieving is the naturally abiding lineage. Basically, we are saying that the basis of the Mahayana achieving is an understanding of what constitutes reality, the two truths.

With regard to whatever phenomenon in question, why can it exist in the first place? It is due to emptiness! But because of not knowing the basis on which everything exists—the emptiness of true existence—this is why we are still circling in cyclic existence. Whatever phenomenon comes to mind, we think that there is something right there, existing from its own side. We then hold on to and grasp it so tightly. This is why we are

stuck in our own samsara.

This is why there is a line in the *Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* on the fourfold emptinesses, “Form is empty.” Its purpose is to overcome our grasping at a self by bringing to mind the understanding that there is really nothing there. What we think exists and that we hold on to has never existed. It has never been there in the first place. It has always been empty of existing truly! All phenomena, everything that exists, arise from emptiness. The deepest nature of all phenomena is emptiness. This is the ultimate truth, the deepest nature of reality.

Having said that, if one were then to grasp at emptiness itself to be truly existent, then one is going to be stuck again and one will never be free from samsara. This is why there is the emptiness of emptiness—emptiness does not exist in and of itself. Emptiness does not exist truly. I guess this is the reason why the next line says, “Emptiness is form.” Form and its emptiness are not distinct separate entities. Form and its emptiness are *one* entity.

The Mahayana achieving is the Mahayana path. The basis for the Mahayana achieving is the emptiness of true existence of all phenomena. As for the Mahayana achieving or the Mahayana path, what is their object of observation? It is all phenomena.

5. *Observed objects of Mahayana achieving*

The observed objects of Mahayana achieving generally cover all phenomena. However, when divided, there are:

- the virtue that is to be adopted
- the non-virtue that is to be abandoned
- the phenomena that are unspecified, i.e., they are neither virtuous or non-virtuous

One has to pass beyond all the superimpositions, i.e., one has to eliminate all the superimpositions or fabrications of phenomena.

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