

## **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 Realisations, 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 4**

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Debate practice: Is a wisdom that directly realises the ten topics, mind generation and so forth, necessarily an exalted knower of all aspects?

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I mentioned before that when we listen to the teachings, we need to do so attentively. As much as possible, we need to listen with an alert mind. Try to see for yourself what is being said.

It is important to not become a 'Dharma bum.' This is more likely to happen to people who have been listening to the Dharma for a fairly long time. They become complacent in that they do not really try to put in any effort. They are only there physically. That is their attitude.

*Khen Rinpoche: You must hug the Dharma!*

Try your best to listen attentively. You can only try your best. The subject matter is challenging. It is difficult but nevertheless try your best. And from my side, I will try to at least open your eyes to show you that the Buddhadharmā is indeed very expansive. It's very deep and very profound.

There is no way that we can go into each and every single detail because you don't have the time. If we were to go into details in our presentation here you may get bored and discouraged because you don't see the point. Then it serves no purpose. That is why we are not doing that here.

Also, going into details work only if the students are hardworking, i.e., they put in the time and effort to learn. Then the teacher also cooperates. In that sense, they are working together. But in the absence of these conditions, there is not much point in going into the details here.

I'm trying to give you some rough idea of the subject matter of the *Abhisamayalamkara*, specifically, the eight categories and the seventy topics. Just a very rough idea.

The first category deals with the knower called the exalted knower of all aspects. Its definition is in the chart. It is a fully developed exalted wisdom that directly realises the ten topics, mind generation and so forth.

What is its boundary? Where does it exist? It exists only on the buddha ground.

There are ten topics that illustrate the exalted knower of all aspects. There are two manners of illustration—by illustrating the cause, one comes to know its result and by illustrating an object, one comes to know the subject that realises the object in question.

If you look at the definition, you may wonder what it is saying but simply speaking, an exalted knower of all aspects is an exalted knower in the continuum of a buddha superior. It is a consciousness that is free of all defilements or obscurations. It is the wisdom truth body.

The definition says that it is a fully developed exalted wisdom that directly realises the ten topics, mind generation and so forth. Through using examples of objects such as mind generation and so forth, the ten topics are trying to illustrate and to help us understand what an exalted knower of all aspects is.

What if somebody were to ask you this question: “Is a wisdom that directly realises the ten topics, mind generation and so forth, necessarily an exalted knower of all aspects?” what would you say?

*Khen Rinpoche: Your mind must be really active. Otherwise, it won't work. What do you think? Yes or no?*

(Student's reply is inaudible).

*Khen Rinpoche: What do you mean when you say there is no pervasion? If your answer is no, give me an example—it is this and not that.*

This is what I mean by going into details because when you go into details, there are so many things that you need to resolve. You can look at it in a simple way, reading through the definition and be happy with that but this is obviously inadequate because you only know the words.

I am asking you this question. That is only one possible scenario. What if someone were to ask you, “If it is a wisdom directly realising the ten topics, mind generation and so forth, is it necessarily an enlightened mind? Is it necessarily an exalted knower of all aspects?” What are you going to say?

*Khen Rinpoche: Is your mind functioning? If your mind is functioning, can you say something? If you have some idea of what I'm talking about, then you should respond.*

(Student's reply is inaudible).

*Khen Rinpoche: First, listen carefully to the question. Can you see that what appears in the definition and what I have just said is not the same?*

*Student 1: No.*

*Khen Rinpoche: Give me an example.*

*Student 1: I have to think about it.*

*Student 2: Last moment of a sentient being.*

*Khen Rinpoche: When you just say that it is the last moment of sentient beings, that is not correct at all. You are not relating your answer to my question.*

*Student 2: The wisdom directly realising mind generation and so forth in the mind of a sentient being in the last moment before he achieves full enlightenment.*

*Khen Rinpoche: She has given this example. What you think about it? Your mind have to be active. Is what she said correct or incorrect? I am giving you some idea of how to activate your mind.*

*Maybe the seniors who have completed the Basic Program before—those who have studied for 15 years!—can come up and say something. The new students may not know much.*

*I'm not going through this again. I want you to know how to think. Don't think it is so simple. "Oh, this is the buddha mind or the enlightened mind." Then finished. It is not that simple. But if you want to study more deeply, if you really want to read the treatises, the teachings of the Buddha and so forth, then you have to know all these words.*

*Student 3: An exalted wisdom directly realising the ten topics, mind generation and so forth is not necessarily an exalted knower of all aspects because the definition states that it is a fully developed wisdom that directly realises the ten topics, mind generation and so forth. Therefore, if it is a wisdom directly realising the ten topics, mind generation and so forth, it is not necessarily an exalted knower of all aspects. An example: the wisdom directly realising the ten topics, mind generation and so forth in the continuum of a Mahayana superior on the grounds before achieving the path of no more learning.*

*Khen Rinpoche: OK. That sounds good but that is not the end. You shouldn't stop there. It is not like that. You should have another question for him. What Student 2 and what he said are almost the same thing. But are you totally satisfied with his answer or do you have some question in mind?*

*Student 2: (Poses questions to Student 3 but her questions are inaudible).*

*Khen Rinpoche: (Commending Student 2) That is good. She is thinking a little bit. The rest of you are not thinking!*

When you talk about the ten topics, the fourth topic is the naturally abiding lineage, the basis of the Mahayana achievings. Essentially it is emptiness, the suchness of the mind.

So among the ten topics, there is at least one that is talking about the ultimate truth, the deeper nature of reality.

Student 2 is asking whether there is a wisdom that directly realises the two truths in the continuum of a sentient being.

*You can see now that it is becoming more complicated. It doesn't end there.*

(Addressing Student 3) *So what are you going to say?*

*Student 3:* The wisdom that directly realises emptiness in the continuum of a Mahayana superior cannot realise conventionalities so perhaps, for a sentient being, the ten topics are not totally realised in one mind.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Therefore, if it is a wisdom that directly realises the ten topics, mind generation and so forth, it has to be a buddha.

*Do you understand what I am trying to say?*

(Responses from Student 2 are inaudible).

*Student 3:* Is there a pervasion of directly realising the ten topics in one mind for a wisdom that directly realises the ten topics, mind generation and so forth to qualify for ...

*Khen Rinpoche:* Is it not clear that based on what has transpired so far, i.e., sentient beings cannot realise the two truths directly at the same time, therefore, a wisdom that directly realises the ten topics, mind generation and so forth, necessarily has to be an exalted knower of all aspects?

*Khen Rinpoche:* So now (back to my question), yes or no? Earlier, your answer was no. You gave an example and that failed. Now I am asking you again. Are you changing your position or are you sticking to the same position now?

*Student 3:* Maybe I will stick to this position and see where we go.

*Khen Rinpoche:* You said, no. Now give an example.

*Student 3:* The wisdom directly realising the ten topics, mind generation and so forth, will not necessarily have to realise them in one mind.

*Khen Rinpoche: What you said is quite good but what I want now is an example—such and such is this and not that. Make it very clear.*

*Today, we are spending time on debating. If you are interested, it is good sometimes to do this.*

*When I talk about what the exalted knower of all aspects is, you think you understand. But in reality, if somebody were to ask you a question, you are totally lost. That means you didn't really understand in the first place.*

*So now, what is the example?*

*Student 3: If I give an example, I will corner myself already!*

*Khen Rinpoche: If you cannot find an example, then a wisdom that directly realises the ten topics, mind generation and so forth, is necessarily an exalted knower of all aspects.*

*Why is that the case? Because if you cannot find an example, this means that there is no alternative. There is no choice. Therefore, it is necessarily so.*

*Khen Rinpoche: Do you accept that position now? Immediately, you say OK. This looks good. That also looks good. It is not like that.*

*After that long debate, does everybody accept this position? If you do not accept it, then come up. If you do accept this position, sit down for now. But I have another question for you. Even if you accept the position, it is not final.*

*Student 4: I think I don't accept the position because I want to try. I think the example can be the subsequent cogniser that is the wisdom directly realising emptiness in the post-meditative session of a Mahayana bodhisattva directly realising the ten topics.*

*Khen Rinpoche: Why are you specifying that it is a subsequent cogniser when there are so many other minds? What is your reason?*

*Student 4: Because of the continuity of that wisdom directly realising emptiness in the meditative equipoise ...*

*Khen Rinpoche: Is your subsequent cogniser a conceptual or non-conceptual mind?*

*Student 4: Conceptual but I don't know how to posit ... conceptually realising directly!*

*Khen Rinpoche: We haven't finished. What is your example?*

*Student 4: I have exhausted my possibilities. I have to go back and think again!*

*Khen Rinpoche: I am still wondering why you said that it is a subsequent cognizer?*

*Student 4:* A subsequent cogniser that is a continuity of that wisdom realising emptiness during post meditative equipoise.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Your example offers no additional purpose to what has already been discussed because when it comes to debate, there is the same problem

*Do you understand? What Students 2 & 3 said, at the end of the debate, it was not so concrete. The examples they gave were similar to one another. There was nothing different so no need to debate again.*

*If you do not agree, come up and give your example. Nothing else.*

*This is why in the monastery, sometimes debate lasts until the morning. It's true. We had whole night debates, from six (in the evening) to six in the morning! Not all the time but sometimes this happens especially on the Buddha days, wheel turning day and so forth.*

Based on what has transpired so far, as of now, you end up with having to say that if it is a wisdom directly realising the ten topics, mind generation and so forth, it is necessarily an exalted knower of all aspects.

*Student 5:* The wisdom that is directly realising the ten topics, that is on the buddha ground but it is outside the pervasion of the exalted knower of all aspects because nowhere does it say the two have the same pervasion.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Are you saying that the wisdom that directly realises the ten topics, mind generation and so forth, exists on the buddha ground but it is not necessarily an exalted knower of all aspects?

*Wow, this is something new. What he said was very good but it is something new to my ears.*

Ven Gyurme: This is called clarifying the *Ornament of Clear Realisations!*

*Khen Rinpoche:* This is what trailblazers do!

*I'm not making fun of him. It is good that you come up with any idea you may have. It doesn't matter. You are all studying. You are all learning.*

I will now phrase it in a different way.

Are you saying that the exalted wisdom that directly realises the ten topics, mind generation and so forth, in the continuum of a buddha superior is *not* an exalted knower of all aspects?

*Student 5:* Yes, I am saying that.

*Khen Rinpoche:* It follows you are saying that because it fulfils the definition.

The example that you ended up having to give is the wisdom directly realizing the 10 topics, mind generation and so forth in the continuum of a buddha superior. You would have to say that it is not an exalted knower of all aspects. But you have to accept that this wisdom is a fully developed wisdom.

*Student 5:* Yes, because it is on the buddha ground.

*Khen Rinpoche:* If it is a fully developed wisdom, then isn't it necessarily an exalted knower of all aspects?

*Or it is not necessarily so? Did you get me?*

*Just relax. You are not in court!*

*Student 5:* I am just thinking. If whatever is an exalted knower of all aspects is as stated in the definition, does that mean that whatever is stated in the definition is always an exalted knower of all aspects?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Well, whatever is in the definition, that's it. I didn't say so. It was said by Maitreya!

But it doesn't mean you cannot argue against it, debate or check it. That is okay. But at the end of the day, if we are not accepting this definition of the exalted knower of all aspects, what will be the consequence? We will abandon this definition. If that is the case, the next question will be, "Then what should be the definition?"

*This is why tonight, we are taking up the whole night.*

*Student 5:* I will accept the definition.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Thank you for accepting the definition. I am joking.

Back to the original question, is the answer yes or no? You cannot forget what the original question is.

*Student 6:* What if the illustration is just a very general thing such as an exalted knower of the tenth ground bodhisattva. Because (the definition) didn't actually state that it must be directly realizing *all* the ten topics *simultaneously*. So, if it is a very general category, then it covers everything. It doesn't say it must be specifically one moment

*Khen Rinpoche:* Your answer came about after a long debate. When you think about it, that is your answer. Do you understand? If you didn't think about it, that answer won't come about. Probably she thought about it and that is the answer she gives.

Her answer is not the same as what have been said so far. She is giving another example.

Maybe you may not understand what she is saying. I don't know. Repeat what you said. Maybe they didn't hear you. Give a short one sentence example.

*Student 6:* The example is the exalted knower of a tenth ground bodhisattva.

*Khen Rinpoche:* That is the example she gives. Do you have any question about it? Come, come. Today is the debate class.

*Student 7:* The definition states "a fully developed wisdom" so it has to realise all the ten topics and so forth, together.

*Student 6:* There is no problem. It is like "a" person who is made up of five aggregates. What's wrong with that? My example has a broader pervasion, that's all.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Don't fight, OK? I am joking.

*Student 6:* Whether the forest has two trees or ten thousand trees, it is still a forest. I don't have to say, "a forest with two trees." I just have to say, "a forest." If I say, "a forest," it encompasses a forest of a thousand trees or a forest of ten thousand trees.

*Student 7:* I don't think we are talking about the same thing. The word "a" is there so it means it must be one mind realising all the ten topics and so forth at one time.

*Khen Rinpoche:* I don't quite understand the significance of the "a" here.

*This is final. I am not going back again. Do you accept the answer given by Guat Cheng (Student 6)? Do you have any questions? If you don't agree with what she said, then give your reason.*

*Student 8:* I thought an exalted knower is necessarily a knower on the buddha ground.

*Khen Rinpoche:* You are not getting the basic question. She is not saying that.

*Student 8:* She said an exalted knower who is a tenth ground bodhisattva. I thought an exalted knower is necessarily a buddha.

*Khen Rinpoche:* (addressing Student 6) *Are you saying that? She is not saying that.*

An exalted knower of all aspects is not equivalent to an exalted knower. Whether it is a knower or an exalted knower, it is just honorifics.

*Khen Rinpoche:* It looks like we are just stuck with one sentence tonight. No, I am not doing this again and again. Just tonight. Next time, I will just read.



*We don't have much time now. Finally, do you accept what she (Student 6) said or not? If you don't accept what she said, please come up and give the reason as to why she is not correct.*

*Student 2:* I tend to agree with Zi Yen (Student 7) because the definition gives me the impression that all the ten topics and so forth are realised in one moment. Otherwise, the definition would read, “directly realising *any* of the ten topics ...” That makes it difficult for me to accept Guat Cheng’s (Student 6) assertion that as long as you can realise one topic, that qualifies you.

*Khen Rinpoche:* *What she said is not correct. Give your reason.*

*Student 9:* For the fourth topic, naturally abiding lineage, the basis of Mahayana achieving, I think the tenth ground bodhisattva will not be able to directly realise suchness without defilement.

The tenth ground bodhisattva will realise emptiness through suchness with defilement but suchness without defilement is only realised by a buddha at the buddha ground. So if I find an illustration—the fourth topic for instance—of someone who realises all the ten topics, it has to be on the buddha ground.

*Khen Rinpoche:* I said earlier that these ten topics illustrate the exalted knower of aspects. There are two manners of illustration. One is illustrating by means of the cause to show what the result or effect is. We have to posit that the naturally abiding lineage have to be included at the time of the cause. Isn't that so?

*Student 9:* How about at the time of the effect?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Does the fourth topic, the naturally abiding lineage, exist on the buddha ground?

You have forgotten the whole *Tathagata Essence!*

*Khen Rinpoche:* *You should understand (from this exercise) how to sharpen and to activate your mind. You have to get involved here. Of course, if you don't get involved, nothing happens.*

*You have to think when somebody is asking a question, “What will my answer be?”*

*Does everyone agree with Guat Cheng? No? Don't just shake your head and say you don't agree. You must have a reason why you don't agree.*

*Student 5:* The tenth ground bodhisattva is a sentient being, yes?

*Khen Rinpoche:* *Yes.*

*Student 5:* Can a sentient being realise conventionalities directly?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Yes.

*Student 5:* That's it.

*Khen Rinpoche:* You must be brave. Don't worry if you make a mistake. If you worry about that, then you are never going to learn anything. You must come up. To learn, you must be brave.

*Student 8:* I couldn't accept what she said because I didn't even know in the first place that a knower and an exalted knower can be the same thing. Now I am wondering, what is the meaning of that word, 'exalted'? And I am wondering how we can have this debate when we don't even know well what the ten topics are specifically?

For example, I am confused about the tenth topic, the definitely issuing achieving.

*Khen Rinpoche:* First, you should ask the question. "I am confused about the last one." Then I will clarify now.

Simply speaking, the tenth topic—definitely issuing achieving—is just the exalted wisdom of the three pure grounds, i.e., the exalted wisdom of someone on the eighth, ninth and tenth grounds.

*Student 8:* Khen Rinpoche said that an exalted knower and an exalted knower of all aspects are two different things. Ven. Gyurme also clarified that the word, 'exalted,' is like an honorific. When do you call a knower an exalted knower?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Now, I understand, I give you a very clear answer.

A knower is a consciousness that is conjoined with renunciation. A knower is defined as the path that is conjoined with renunciation. So in one way, 'path' and 'knower' are the same.

*Khen Rinpoche:* What else do you have to clarify?

*Student 8:* Exalted knower. Because Guat Cheng referred to the exalted knower that is the tenth ground bodhisattva ...

*Ven. Gyurme:* Sometimes it is translated as knower. Sometimes it is translated as an exalted knower. It doesn't matter whether it is a knower or an exalted knower. They are the same. But an exalted knower is not necessarily an exalted knower of all aspects.

*Student 8:* So I can use the terms, 'knower' and 'exalted knower' interchangeably?

*Ven. Gyurme:* No. They have to be used however they are used!

*Khen Rinpoche:* You have to know the definition of a knower, not the English words. In Tibetan, it means to know something. The definition is that it is a path that is conjoined with renunciation. Sometimes, it is translated as ‘exalted knower’ to differentiate it from the English meaning of the word, ‘knower’ because a knower can refer to any consciousness.

*Student 8:* Can I make this statement—an exalted knower is necessarily a knower whose mind is conjoined with renunciation?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Correct. Now that I have clarified all your doubts, what happened to Guat Cheng’s statement? You were supposed to say something.

*Student 8:* Guat Cheng’s point is at such a high level, I cannot get to that level.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Then you do three prostrations.

*Student 8:* I am going to offer mandala to her.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Long one. Long one. Nothing to say to her? Think, think. Make the mind work until you cannot think any more, then you have to accept. Then that is very good.

*Student 2:* After thinking, I have to accept her answer.

*Student 9:* Is there still room for development for the exalted knower on the tenth ground or is it fully developed?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Such a lousy question!

*Who is discussing that? In the first place, you are not listening. That is why you need to listen. What is the question in the first place? She said no. She gave an example. Now what is your problem?*

(Student 9’s response is inaudible).

*Khen Rinpoche:* Your brain is not working. It is very simple. I am not giving the actual definition. I cut out the ‘fully developed’ part. I read only half (of the definition). She said that is not the exalted knower of all aspects and she gave an example.

Unless somebody can prove that what Guat Cheng said is a fully developed wisdom ...

*Khen Rinpoche:* If no one can say anything, that becomes the final answer.

This wisdom of the tenth ground bodhisattva directly realizes the two truths. Yes or no?

We have to expand our enquiry. Basically this particular wisdom of that bodhisattva superior directly realizes the two truths and directly realises the ten topics.

*Khen Rinpoche: I am not sure whether I am going to win or not. What you are saying is correct but still I want to make sure that you get it deep down there.*

The mind in the continuum of a sentient being realises the two truths directly.

*What is your answer? I am going that way as I mentioned that I want to go deeper into the topic.*

The mind that is in the continuum of a sentient being is realizing the two truths directly, isn't it?

*Student 6: I don't quite understand the way you are phrasing it. What if I were to say no?*

*Khen Rinpoche: It is up to you. It is your freedom.*

*Student 6: It is a bit difficult to understand this part. What is the difference between 'a mind in a sentient being' and 'a mind in the mental continuum of a sentient being'?*

*Khen Rinpoche: It is the same thing.*

That sentient being has seen the two truths directly.

*Student 6: Yes.*

*Khen Rinpoche: All of you must think. When she says yes, do you all agree with her? You must work together and not only look to her for the answer. The question is addressed to each and everyone here so you all have to think.*

*Khen Rinpoche: So, is it that the sentient being has seen the two truths directly?*

*Student 6: Yes.*

*Khen Rinpoche: Yes?*

The sentient being sees emptiness directly?

*Don't just say yes. It is not that easy to say yes. Think carefully.*

So the sentient being has realized emptiness directly?

*Student 6: Yes.*

*Khen Rinpoche: This sentient being is a superior.*

*Student 6: Yes. Not all sentient beings, just this particular sentient being.*

*Khen Rinpoche:* Is a sentient being a superior?

*Student 6:* A sentient being is not necessarily a superior.

*Khen Rinpoche:* We are not discussing whether it is necessarily or not necessarily so. The question is not that.

You remember when you gave your example? It was a general example, not a specific example. Now I am going in that direction too.

The question is, is the sentient being a superior?

*Student 6:* No.

*Khen Rinpoche:* It follows that the sentient being is a superior because the sentient being sees emptiness directly.

*Student 6:* OK. I understand.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Then what?

*Student 6:* I have to change that one. Not the original one but the other one.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Which one?

*Student 6:* The one about the superior is a sentient being.

*Ven Gyurme:* No, you have to say that sentient beings do not realize emptiness directly.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Because you said, then you go back one more step—so sentient being doesn't realize the two truths directly.

*Student 6:* Yes. It will reverse back to refute the original answer.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Superiors don't see the two truths directly.

*Student 6:* They do.

*Khen Rinpoche:* A superior necessarily realizes the two truths directly?

*Student 6:* Yes they realise directly but not simultaneously.

(Another student joins in but is not audible).

*Khen Rinpoche:* If it is a superior, it necessarily realizes the two truths directly.

*Student 6:* Yes. A superior necessarily realizes the two truths directly.

*Khen Rinpoche:* The person who is in meditative equipoise on the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing sees the two truths directly?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Of course many of you may not understand the terms I am using here. I am sorry about that. But some of them have been here a long time here. They have already completed the Basic Program so they will have some idea. Some of you who are new may have no idea what I am talking about but don't worry, OK?

*Student 6:* No.

*Khen Rinpoche:* It follows that individual realizes the two truths directly because he is a superior.

*Student 6:* Yes.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Your thesis or starting point is the thing that you can never give up. You started by saying that if it is a superior, he necessarily realizes the truths. Then if you accept that, you went against your thesis.

When you form a thesis or state your position, that is not done lightly. You have thought about it. That is why you take up a position. You stand by it and you don't change it casually. It doesn't matter whether it is right or wrong. But because you have not thought things through, you do not have a well-considered position. Then you will be easily swayed by what others say. Every day, every minute, you will be changing positions. Then you have numberless positions. That is called a complete lack of understanding.

Because you do not have a position that has been well thought through, even when you go and debate, in the end, you will be left with nothing. The whole point of debate is that you should get something out of it. You arrive at some understanding and some certainty, "Yes, it is definitely like that." You have eliminated all the possibilities. You generate some conviction.

*It is a bit like boxing. How painful it is when you are punched in the face. Debate is like that. How painful it is to let go of your logic, your thesis.*

The point of today's exercise is to show you that if you really want to learn philosophy, the treatises, this is the only way. You have to really think and analyse so that you can come to some understanding. There is no other alternative.

*Khen Rinpoche:* I don't know how helpful this kind of discussion is. I am not sure.

*In the end, what do you get out of today's session? I want to know.*

(Student's response is inaudible).

*She said she learnt to listen carefully.*

*What else did you learn? That is not the main point.*

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