

Transcript of the teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on *The Eight Categories and Seventy Topics*

Root Text: *The Eight Categories and Seventy Topics* by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltsen, translated by Jampa Gendun. Final draft October 2002, updated May 2011. © Jampa Gendun & FPMT, Inc.

Lesson 6**28 June 2016**

Exalted knower of all aspects—Review. Relationship of the ten topics. The tenets of the Yogic Autonomy Middle Way School. The knower of paths (cont'd). The need for a knower of paths. The eleven topics: 1. Limbs of the knower of paths.

We have been looking at the ten topics for the last two weeks. If there is anything that you would like me to clarify or if you have specific difficulties pertaining to what we have covered so far, you can ask me now.

As you know, we are not studying the eight categories and seventy topics in detail. It is just not possible at the moment to do this. What we have been doing and will continue to do is to get a rough idea of what the eight categories and seventy topics are.

For most of you, probably this is the first time that you are studying these topics. There are many new terms that you have to learn and even doing that alone will take some time. But you do have to pay attention to them. You may be unfamiliar with the terms now but you have to learn them. For those of you who want to study in the long run, this is necessary as these terms act as the bases for your future studies, especially if there is an opportunity to study the great treatises in detail. Your preparation for that starts now!

THE KNOWER OF ALL ASPECTS—REVIEW

Question: With regard to the object of intent, it was mentioned that in order to achieve the object of intent of the Mahayana achievings, one focusses on particular objects such as virtue, non-virtue and the unspecified. I don't understand what is meant by focussing on virtue, non-virtue and the unspecified.

Answer: The definition of the exalted knower of all aspects is a fully developed exalted wisdom directly realizing the ten topics, mind generation and so forth. The "so forth" refers to the rest of the topics that make up the topics that illustrate the exalted knower of all aspects. As I have mentioned earlier, the main trainees for whom this text is intended are those seeking to achieve the exalted knower of all aspects, i.e., achieving full enlightenment.

Relationship of the ten topics

- For these trainees who are seeking omniscience, what kind of attitude must they possess? The attitude that the main trainees of this text must possess is the mind

generation (topic #1), an uncontrived mind that seeks to achieve the state of full enlightenment. So the main object of attainment of such trainees is the exalted knower of all aspects, i.e., achieving omniscience or full enlightenment.

- In order to achieve this goal, he must cultivate the path that will lead him to this goal. But before he can cultivate the path, the trainee must listen to the instructions in order to achieve his goal, omniscience. As such, there is the topic of the Mahayana precepts or Mahayana instructions (topic #2).
- After the trainee listens to the teachings on the precepts, he reflects on these teachings. This occurs primarily on the Mahayana path of accumulation. By hearing and reflecting on the Mahayana precepts on the path of accumulation, the bodhisattva achieves the path of preparation, also called the four branches of definite discrimination (topic #3) that arises from meditation.
- The fourth topic is the naturally abiding lineage, the basis of Mahayana achievings (topic #4). The main discussion here is still in the context of the path of preparation that is essentially based on the suchness of the mind. That being the case, we use this opportunity to insert an extensive discussion of buddha nature. The naturally abiding lineage *is* the basis of the Mahayana achievings.
- With the naturally abiding lineage as the basis, what are the objects of observation of the Mahayana achievings? As such, there is the fifth topic where there is a description of the observed objects of the Mahayana achievings (topic #5). Another way of saying the objects of observation of the Mahayana achievings is the objects of observation of the practice, i.e., the objects that one focusses on or pays attention to in one's practice. These are the virtue that is to be cultivated and the non-virtue—the class of the thoroughly afflicted phenomena, such as attachment and desire—that are to be abandoned. What is the purpose of focussing on virtue? Virtue is that which is to be adopted. What is the purpose of focussing on non-virtue then? Non-virtue is that which is to be abandoned.
- What is the intent behind cultivating virtue and abandoning non-virtue? The intent is to achieve full enlightenment. Specifically, the intent is to achieve the three objects of intent of the Mahayana achievings (topic #6)—the great heroic mind, the great abandonment and the great realization. In order to achieve these three greatnesses that are the objects of intent, one must cultivate the path. One must practise to achieve these three greatnesses. Otherwise, these three greatnesses will not be achieved.
- What will enable us to achieve these three greatnesses that are the objects of intent? We have to practise the four Mahayana achievings:
 - Achieving through armour (topic #7)
 - Achieving through engagement (topic #8)
 - Achieving through the collections (topic #9)
 - Definitely issuing achieving (topic #10)

I have gone through roughly what the four Mahayana achievings are. There is no need to go through them now. There is no way to cover these in detail. For now, you just need to know that the exalted knower of all aspects is illustrated by these ten topics. You have to know at least the names of the ten topics and what they are.

Now, you should have some rough idea of why they are there and the relationship between the topics—why the mind generation is the first topic, followed by the

precepts as the second topic and so forth. This is what we can do for the time being. For those of you who are really interested and want to study this in greater detail, perhaps, we can distribute the root text of the *Eight Categories and Seventy Topics*. The root text lists out the definitions of all the seventy topics and their divisions but there is no further explanation. Since you will not understand anything just by reading the text, that is one of the reasons why we didn't distribute it earlier. However, for those of you who are really interested, who want to read it, arrangements can be made for you.

Another reason why we didn't distribute the text is because some people may get discouraged when they look at the text. This is not very helpful and that is another reason why we have not given out the text.

For our purposes here, you just need to know these words, “exalted knower of all aspects” or *rnam mkhyen* in Tibetan. Now, you should at least have some rough idea of the ten topics. In a way, it is quite easy. The exalted knower of all aspects refers to the mind of a buddha.

If somebody were to ask you, you should be able to say, “the exalted knower of all aspects” because the mind of the buddha superior has a name. Everything has a name. So by coming to class, at the very least, you should be able to say the words, *rnam mkhyen* or the exalted knower of all aspects. Simply speaking, it is the mind of a buddha superior. Who has such a mind? Only a buddha superior. Where does it exist? Only on the buddha ground.

For some of you, these are new words. You have to learn them. What do they mean? From now on, whenever you hear the words, *rnam mkhyen* or exalted knower of all aspects, immediately, you should know it is the mind of a buddha superior. At least, you must know this.

Question: Following from this—the exalted knower of all aspects, the mind of a buddha superior—is it wrong to say then that it is equivalent to the Sangha Jewel?

Khen Rinpoche: Sangha Jewel? This cannot be the question.

Student 1: So it is not something that relates to the Buddha Jewel, Dharma Jewel or Sangha Jewel. Is that correct?

Khen Rinpoche: You have to think about what you mean when you say Sangha Jewel. There is no connection here.

Student 1: Because you mentioned the mind of a buddha superior. We often refer to a buddha's holy body, holy speech and holy mind. I am just trying to understand where the exalted knower of all aspects belongs if you say it is the mind of a buddha superior.

Khen Rinpoche: I have already explained this belongs to the Buddha's holy mind. I think I made it very clear just now.

What is the boundary of *rnam mkhyen*? It exists only on the buddha ground. If you

expand on that, then only buddha superiors have it. If it exists only in the minds of buddha superiors, that means it does not exist in those who are not buddha superiors.

There are many new terms so the initial challenge is picking up those new terms. Try to see what they are trying to say. When I present this information, you must try to understand what I am saying and listen attentively.

The tenets of the Yogic Autonomy Middle Way School (Yogachara Svatantrika)

Many of you have gone through the topic of tenets. Among the four Buddhist tenets, our presentation of the eight categories and seventy topics is according to the Middle Way School and, within the Middle Way School, specifically, it is according to the Yogacara Svatantrika (the Yogic Autonomy Middle Way School). You have to understand that these eight categories and seventy topics are explained from the position of this tenet.

According to this tenet, their presentation of the three vehicles—the Hearer’s Vehicle, the Solitary Realizer’s Vehicle and the Great Vehicle—has different objects of meditation and different objects of abandonment. According to this tenet:

- For the hearers:
 - The main object of meditation is the subtle selflessness of persons, i.e., the emptiness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.
 - The main object of abandonment is the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, together with its seeds.
- For the solitary realisers:
 - The main object of meditation is the emptiness of subject and object as different entities.
 - The main object of abandonment is the apprehension of subject and object as different entities, together with its seeds.
- For the bodhisattvas:
 - The main object of meditation is the emptiness of true existence, i.e., the subtle selflessness of phenomena.
 - The main object of abandonment is the subtle self of phenomena, i.e., the apprehension of true existence, together with its seeds.

Vehicle	Object of meditation	Object of abandonment
Hearers	The subtle selflessness of persons, i.e., the emptiness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person	The apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, together with its seeds
Solitary Realisers	The emptiness of subject and object as different entities	The apprehension of subject and object as different entities, together its seeds
Bodhisattvas	The emptiness of true existence, i.e., the subtle selflessness of phenomena.	The subtle self of phenomena, i.e., the apprehension of true existence, together with its seeds

You have to know well the main objects of meditation and main objects of abandonment for the hearers, solitary realisers and bodhisattvas according to the Yogic Autonomy Middle Way School because the presentation of the eight categories and seventy topics is based on the views of this tenet. If you don’t know this clearly, later on when we proceed further with the definitions, confusion may set in. We have covered these

points in the module on tenets so this is to refresh your memory.

THE KNOWER OF PATHS (CONT'D)

Now, let's look at the definition of the knower of paths again. The definition of knower of paths is a Mahayana superior's clear realizer conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness within the continuum of the person who possesses it.

What is its boundary? Where does it exist? The knower of paths exists from the Mahayana path of seeing up to the buddha ground. It does not exist prior to the Mahayana path of seeing.

What is a knower of paths? Simply speaking, it is a path in the continuum of a Mahayana superior. As long as it is a path in the continuum of a Mahayana superior, that is a knower of paths. So, a knower of paths and a path in the continuum of a Mahayana superior are mutually inclusive. If you want to know what the knower of paths is in a simple way, just remember that it is any path in the continuum of a Mahayana superior. At the very least, you must be able to say this. If you are asked, "What is the knower of paths?" you must be able to say that it is a path in the continuum of a Mahayana superior.

If we want to go into the details, there are many other things that you must already know. Otherwise, there is no way to study this material, to make progress in your studies and gain greater understanding of the subject. For example, an understanding of the knower of paths, especially its boundary, hinges on your prior study and understanding of the five paths and ten grounds. Otherwise, you may not even know what a Mahayana superior is. If there is a Mahayana superior, is there a Mahayana ordinary being? As it says here, the knower of paths exists from the Mahayana path of seeing. You may be wondering what a path of seeing is. This is why when we study philosophy, we must not forget what has been covered earlier.

The definition starts with a Mahayana superior. There isn't a Mahayana superior who has not realized emptiness directly. If you remember our discussion of the Mahayana paths and grounds, it looks like that once the bodhisattva is on the middling path of accumulation, he would have realized emptiness by then. When does the bodhisattva realize emptiness directly? In terms of the paths and grounds, it is on the path of seeing.

A Mahayana superior necessarily has realized emptiness directly. In the continuum of a Mahayana superior, whatever practice that exists in her mind, whether it is the meditation on compassion, bodhichitta and so forth, there is not a single practice that is *not* conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness. So what you have to understand from the definition is this: If it is an exalted knower in the continuum of a Mahayana superior, it is necessarily conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness.

Somebody may ask you, "If it is a mind in the continuum of a bodhisattva superior, does it necessarily realize emptiness directly?" or "If it is a mind in a continuum of a bodhisattva superior, is that mind necessarily conjoined with the wisdom directly

realizing emptiness?"

Khen Rinpoche: You must understand that what I said in the first question and the second question that I am asking now are different. Or are they the same?

If it is a mind in the continuum of a Mahayana superior, is it necessarily conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness?

Student 2: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: Hup Cheng said yes. He doesn't come to class but he is better than all of you. You have to think. When I say something, then you must have some idea. If you don't think, then there is no point. Is it necessarily conjoined?

If you say that it is necessarily conjoined, then the discussion is over. But if you were to say that it is not necessarily conjoined, you must be able to point out at least an example. Otherwise, you cannot say no.

Khen Rinpoche: Hup Cheng said yes. Does anybody say no? OK. You said no but you must think of an example.

Student 1: The wisdom directly realizing emptiness itself.

Khen Rinpoche: Everybody must listen to what she is saying and how I respond to what she says.

So there is a mind in the continuum of a Mahayana superior that is *not* conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness. Here the example cited is the wisdom directly realizing emptiness itself in the continuum of the superior. Basically, the argument is whether something can be conjoined with itself?

Khen Rinpoche: Do you agree with the example? They must work together.

Isn't the wisdom directly realizing emptiness in the continuum of a Mahayana superior a knower of paths? If you say yes, then what is the consequence?

Khen Rinpoche: Your brain must work together. So what are you going to say?

If it is a mind in the continuum of a Mahayana superior, it is necessarily conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness. So the wisdom directly realising emptiness in the continuum of that Mahayana superior is conjoined with itself. Do you accept that?

[Student's response is inaudible.]

Khen Rinpoche: The definition says many things, not only that.

There are bodhisattva superiors who have desire. Is that a knower of paths? Is the desire in the continuum of a bodhisattva superior conjoined with the wisdom directly

realizing emptiness?

If you say yes, then what is the meaning of “conjoined” here? When we say the desire in the continuum of a bodhisattva superior is *conjoined* with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness, *how* is that desire conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness?

You should keep this in mind. A knower of paths is a path in the continuum of a Mahayana superior. As long as it is a path in the continuum of a Mahayana superior, it is a knower of paths. For example:

- the wisdom realizing the selflessness of persons in the continuum of a Mahayana superior is a knower of paths.
- the great compassion in the continuum of a Mahayana superior is a knower of paths.
- the mind generation in the continuum of a Mahayana superior is a knower of paths.

Is the great compassion in the buddha superior’s continuum a knower of paths? You should be able to answer this immediately. There is no need to think. Yes or no?

Khen Rinpoche: Why is it a knower of paths? You just have to give a simple answer.

It is a knower of paths because it is a path in the continuum of a Mahayana superior.

There are the 10 topics that illustrate the exalted knower of aspects. There are a lot of details. Next we have the knower of paths.

A knower of paths is a knower that knows all the three paths fully and completely. Here, the three paths mean the hearers’ path, the solitary realizers’ path and the Mahayana path. I have just said that a knower of paths is the knower of all the three paths completely. This is just an explanation of its etymology and it does not imply certain limits of pervasion.

The need for a knower of paths

Why is Chapter Two of the *Ornament for Clear Realization* an explanation of the knower of paths? Why does it come after the exalted knower of all aspects? This is because in order to attain the exalted knower of all aspects, one must meditate on the knower of paths thoroughly without which one cannot achieve the exalted knower of all aspects.

An exalted knower of all aspects is essentially the final wisdom that realizes all phenomena directly. The final wisdom means the perfect or highest level of wisdom attainable that realizes all phenomena directly.

In a way, what the knower of paths is saying is that in order to achieve this final wisdom that sees all phenomena directly, cultivating a path that meditates on emptiness alone is not sufficient to attain the exalted knower of all aspects.

Can one achieve the exalted knower of all aspects by the practice of going for refuge to the Three Jewels alone? No. The practice of refuge alone will not enable one to achieve the exalted knower of all aspects. Likewise, the mere meditation on or the cultivation of renunciation will not enable one to achieve the exalted knower of all aspects.

The point is that without actualizing the knower of paths, there is no way one can achieve the exalted knower of all aspects. If one does not engage in the complete practice of the three paths—the hearer’s path, the solitary realizer’s path and the Mahayana path —there is no way to achieve the exalted knower of all aspects.

From this, you can see that a Mahayana superior meditates on the hearer’s path and the solitary realizer’s path. It is not as if the Mahayana superior does not meditate on the hearer’s path. It is not that the Mahayana superior does not meditate on the solitary realizer’s path. So the hearer’s path and the solitary realizer’s path are not objects to be discarded simply because they are lower paths. Although a Mahayana superior has already realized emptiness directly, nevertheless, they still cultivate the hearer’s path and the solitary realizer’s path.

Why does a Mahayana superior need to meditate on the hearer’s path and the solitary realizer’s path? What do buddha superiors do? When one achieves enlightenment, the buddha superior works to accomplish the welfare of the trainees of the three lineages—the hearers, the solitary realizers and those of the Mahayana lineage. In order to work for their welfare, the buddha superior has to turn the Wheel of Dharma of the three lineages for these persons of the three lineages. As such, in order for him to be able to do that while on the path, the bodhisattva superior has to meditate and cultivate the hearer’s path and the solitary realizer’s path.

Here, we are talking about the bodhisattva superiors. They work for the benefit of sentient beings. They don’t wait until enlightenment is achieved. This means that they also work for the benefit and welfare of the hearers and the solitary realizers. In order to work for them, they have to show them the path—the hearer’s path and the solitary realizer’s path. The bodhisattva superior can only show these paths after he has cultivated them himself. The bodhisattva superiors will not be able to teach the hearers and solitary realizers if they do not have their own experiences of the hearer’s path and the solitary realizer’s path. Therefore, the bodhisattva superiors have to cultivate the knower of paths.

Definiendum	Definition	Boundary	No. of topics	Topics (Seventy topics)
Knower of Paths	A Mahayana superior’s clear realizer conjoined with the wisdom directly realizing emptiness within the continuum of the person who possesses it.	Mahayana path of seeing through the buddha ground	11	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Limbs of knower of paths 2. Knower of paths that knows hearers' paths 3. Knower of paths that knows solitary realizers' paths 4. Mahayana path of seeing 5. Function of the Mahayana path of meditation 6. Mahayana path of meditation of belief 7. Beneficial qualities of the path of meditation of belief 8. Path of meditation of dedication 9. Path of meditation of rejoicing 10. Path of meditation of achieving 11. The completely pure path of meditation

The eleven topics

There are eleven topics that illustrate the knower of paths.

~ 1. Limbs of knower of paths

- One can understand the limbs of knower of paths in terms of the cause of the knower of paths.
- One can understand the limbs of knower of paths in terms of the entity of the knower of paths.
- One can understand the limbs of knower of paths in terms of the result of the knower of paths.
- One can understand the limbs of knower of paths from the perspectives of all three together

In order to generate the knower of paths, one must be free from the obstacles to the generation of the knower of paths. One of these obstacles is pride. It is said that the gods of the desire realms and form realms, because of experiencing the ripening effects of their past karma, emit light naturally. It is said that their bodies emit light and they are quite proud of this. As the Buddha has to work for the gods in the desire and form realms, the Buddha has to put on a light display that will completely outshine these gods. When these gods are outshone, they will be humbled and generate faith in the Buddha. This then makes them suitable bases for the arising of mind generation or bodhicitta in their minds and for the knower of paths to be cultivated.

But just possessing the freedom from manifest pride alone will not make the knower of paths arise in that person's mind. A very important condition is the mind generation. In order for the knower of paths to arise eventually, that individual must not only be free of manifest pride but he must develop mind generation. The person who can develop the knower of paths in his mind must be a person who has mind generation.

These individuals who possess mind generation are the actual basis, meaning that they are the people who can actually develop the knower of paths. The people who can actually develop the knower of path are the people who possess mind generation. So the actual basis for cultivating the knower of paths must be a person who possesses mind generation.

Having said this, some people may wonder, "Does that mean only bodhisattvas can develop the knower of paths?"

The answer to that is, "Actually, all sentient beings can develop the knower of paths because the lineage (or buddha nature) pervades and is possessed by all sentient beings."

Here, there is a discussion of whether there are three final vehicles or whether there is just one final vehicle. There are sutras that say that there are three final vehicles. There are also sutras that say there is just one final vehicle. You can see that the different tenets have different assertions. If one takes the position that there are three final vehicles, what one is also saying is that not every sentient being can generate the knower of paths.

There are sutras that mention there being three final vehicles. The *Sutra Unravelling the Thought* says, right from the beginning, that it has always been the case that in the continuum of each and every sentient being, there is the uncontaminated seed that determines their highest potential. It is kind of pre-determined for each sentient being whether they can achieve the hearer's enlightenment, the solitary realizer's enlightenment or full enlightenment. As such, there are three final vehicles. Based on this assertion, a person who is of the hearer's lineage will achieve the nirvana without remainder of a hearer. He will be like that forever. He will always remain as a hearer arhat and he cannot become a buddha. As such, this view says that there are three final vehicles.

In this sutra, it is also said that there are sentient beings who are hopeless in that there is nothing we can do with them. No matter what they do, they cannot achieve enlightenment. There is no way that they can achieve enlightenment. This is just a view.

But you will also find sutras that say clearly that there is just one final vehicle.

Both are sutras. Which are we going to believe? We cannot decide on an issue just because a sutra says so. We will find different sutras saying completely different things. How do we decide? Therefore, it is very important to distinguish between sutras of interpretive meaning and sutras of definitive meaning. We must know how to differentiate between these two.

Please keep in mind that it was the same Buddha who said these different things. In the *Sutra Unravelling the Thought*, the Buddha said that there are three final vehicles. Then in another sutra, the *King of the Samadhi Sutra* (the *King of Concentration Sutra*), the Buddha said there is one final vehicle. So sometimes, the Buddha said there is one final vehicle and at other times, he said there are three final vehicles.

In the *King of Concentration Sutra*, the Buddha said there is one final vehicle. Ultimately, we can only settle this issue by relying on reasoning. This is why we learnt about the tathagata essence (buddha lineage) to establish that, at the end of the day, there is just one final vehicle. This means everybody can become a buddha. The main argument is that although we have obscurations and defilements, they have never abided in the nature of our mind. Even though the obscurations and defilements are there, they are adventitious and can be separated from the mind.

The buddhas work unceasingly and without interruption to help all sentient beings to be free from these adventitious defilements. They do so spontaneously without any effort. The buddhas work for us sentient beings without effort, spontaneously and uninterruptedly at all times.

This is how we use reasoning to prove and establish that all sentient beings can be enlightened because the defilements are adventitious and there are methods to overcome them.

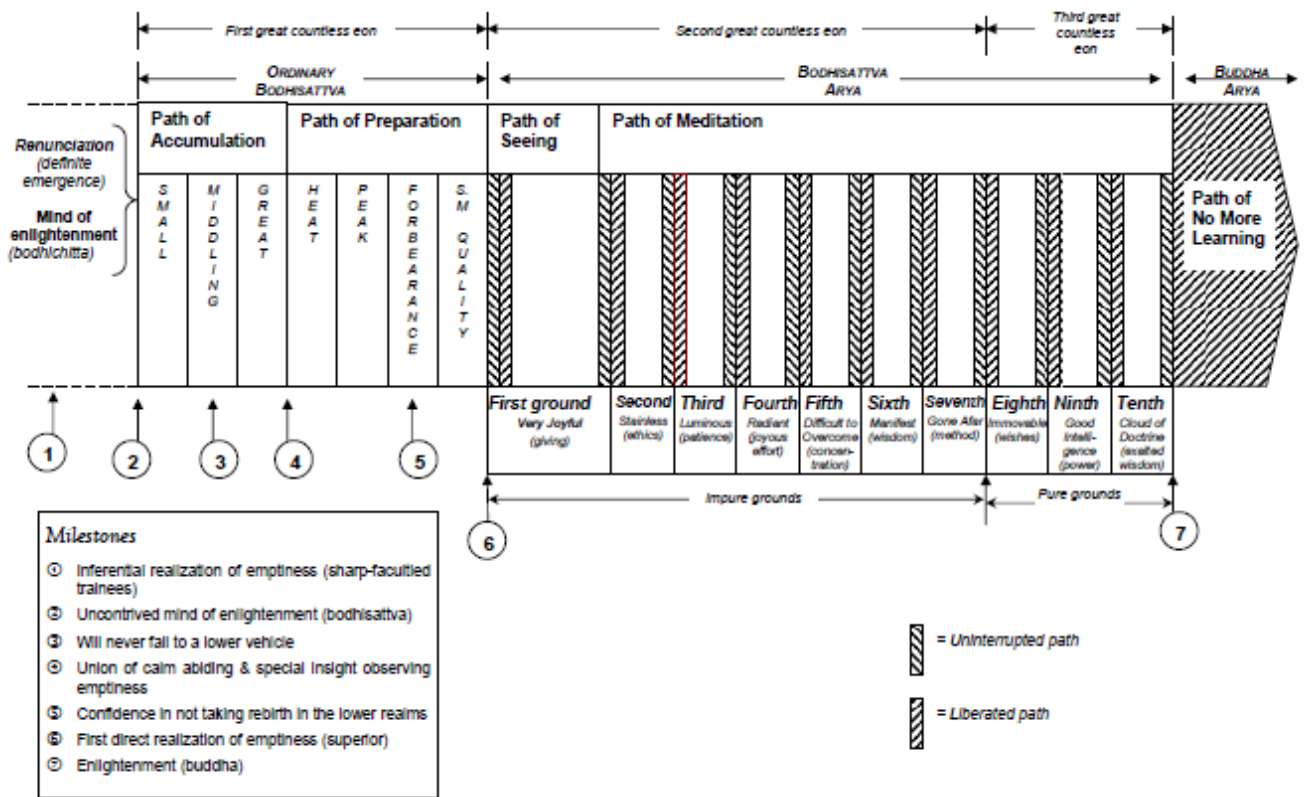
So what is the purpose then behind the Buddha teaching that there are three final vehicles? The reason is because sentient beings are of diverse dispositions, i.e., their

capacity, interests and inclinations are so varied and different. The Buddha taught that there are three final vehicles in order to cause some people to become at least hearer or solitary realizer arhats first for the time being. Actually his real position is that there is just one final vehicle in that all sentient beings can become buddhas. This is the reality.

The sutra gives the example of a skilful captain of a ship that is sailing to a faraway destination. It will take a long time to reach that destination. During the voyage, people will get bored and tired. The skilful captain then miraculously conjures up an island and says, “There we are!” This is to allow some people to take a rest so that they can continue with the journey later on. So for the time being, the skilful captain leads his passengers to this temporary island, which is not the final destination.

After his passengers have rested, the skilful captain will say, “This is not the final destination. The final destination is somewhere else.” Likewise, there are always people who are not ready to enter the Mahayana path at a specific time. So they are guided into the hearer’s or solitary realizer’s paths for the time being. Ultimately, however, all sentient beings can be enlightened. This is why the reality is that there is one final vehicle, not three.

**Path of Someone who is of Definite Mahayana Lineage:
 Svatantrika Madhyamaka**



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