

**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 7****30 June 2016**


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Exam Presentation for Module 8. The knower of paths (cont'd). The eleven topics: 1. Limbs of the 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.

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**EXAM PRESENTATION FOR MODULE 8**

(A student presented her chosen verses from Chapter Eight of *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*).

*Khen Rinpoche: My English is not that good. So I cannot read everybody's exam papers. It is impossible for me to read everything as my English is limited but I have read one or two papers and they are really good. It is wonderful that you have put in the effort and that you have done your job.*

*What she (referring to the student who made the presentation) has presented is the same as if all the buddhas, bodhisattvas and the great masters were talking to you. There is no difference. So whenever someone reads something, it is good to listen and to meditate. Listening to the words is important.*

*Also there is another purpose as to why you study so much. Of course, one goal is to have some kind of realization within yourself. Even if that is not possible, at least you are able to share your knowledge with other people. When you have both the experience and the knowledge, then your sharing will be at a different level. At the moment, you are just sharing your small knowledge with other people. This is the beginning. I hope that you can do more in future. We have studied the Buddhadharma for so many years. It is wonderful to train yourself to talk for five, ten minutes. I think it is very wonderful that there are about 18 people here who have chosen to do this. But most students do not want to do this. Of course, this is your freedom of choice.*

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**THE KNOWER OF PATHS (CONT'D)**

As the words suggest, the knower of paths is an understanding of the paths. Which paths are they referring to? It is the paths of the hearers, solitary realizers and

bodhisattvas. A knower of these three paths knows them completely. Having said that, you must know that this is just an understanding of what a knower of paths is. What I have just said is not the definition of a knower of paths. I am not going to talk about the definition again.

| Definiendum     | Definition                                                                                                                                     | Boundary                                          | No. of topics | Topics (Seventy topics)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Knower of Paths | 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"> <li>1. Limbs of knower of paths</li> <li>2. Knower of paths that knows hearers' paths</li> <li>3. Knower of paths that knows solitary realizers' paths</li> <li>4. Mahayana path of seeing</li> <li>5. Function of the Mahayana path of meditation</li> <li>6. Mahayana path of meditation of belief</li> <li>7. Beneficial qualities of the path of meditation of belief</li> <li>8. Path of meditation of dedication</li> <li>9. Path of meditation of rejoicing</li> <li>10. Path of meditation of achieving</li> <li>11. The completely pure path of meditation</li> </ol> |

In short, 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, then it is necessarily a knower of paths. It doesn't matter what illustration you come up with, as long as the illustration is a path in the continuum of a Mahayana superior, it is necessarily a knower of paths. You must not forget this but remember this with great certainty.

#### *The eleven topics*

There are eleven topics that illustrate the knower of paths.

#### *~ 1. The limbs of knower of paths*

The first topic is the limbs of knower of paths. In order to generate a knower of paths, one must be free from manifest pride because it is an obstacle that hinders the generation of a knower of paths. But being free of this obstacle alone is not sufficient for a knower of paths to be generated in our mental continuum.

The basis that directly brings about the generation of a knower of paths is mind generation (or the generated mind). Having said this, a qualm may arise: Does it mean that only bodhisattvas can generate the knower of paths? If we look at this from an overarching viewpoint, then all sentient beings possess the potential to generate the knower of paths.

- The basis that leads to the actual or direct arising of the knower of paths is mind generation.
- But all sentient beings indirectly have the basis for developing the knower of paths.

It is said that one of the greatneses of the lam-rim, the stages of the path to

enlightenment, is that if we understand the lamrim well, then that understanding enables us to see all the scriptures as instructions.

*Khen Rinpoche: Do you know why this is so?*

In Tibet, some people have well-equipped kitchens. They have containers for everything: a container for rice, a container for beans, a container for salt, a container for sugar and so forth. If you have containers for everything, then when somebody pays you a visit and gives you a small handful of rice, what are you going to do with it? Since you already have a container for rice, you will add the rice that you have just received into the rice container. Then if somebody gives you peas, since you have a container for peas, you will add that gift of peas to your peas container.

*Khen Rinpoche: Do you understand? It is so easy and simple. That is it!*

So when we know the lam-rim well, just like the person who has many containers at home, whatever we study, starting from the words and meanings of the treatises, those profound philosophical subjects, we would be able to put them into their respective containers.

For example, when we are studying material that is directly related and relevant to the path that is shared with the person of medium capacity, we will categorize and classify that knowledge and put it into the container of the path of a person of medium capacity.

If we pick up some other information that is useful for our practice of the path of the person of small capacity, we will put this information into the container of the path of a person of small capacity and use it accordingly.

When we know the lam-rim well, this is what we are able to do with our studies. We are able to classify whatever we have learnt and put them into their proper categories. We will also be able to use them in our practice.

However, if someone were to give the same handful of rice to a beggar, this may be useless to him. He may say, “Why are you giving me this small handful of rice?” The beggar may not appreciate it because he does not have any containers and he may just throw the rice away. I guess sometimes we are like the beggar because we don’t know how to use the knowledge we have. We don’t appreciate it, thinking it is useless and we are almost ready to discard it.

I have mentioned this before and I am going to say it again. We should be able to classify what we have learnt into the relevant sections of the lam-rim and appreciate and use that knowledge. But in order to do that, your understanding of the new information, concepts and topics that you pick up as you progress in your studies cannot be done at the expense of what you have learnt earlier. If you completely forget the words, concepts, definitions and so forth of what you have learnt before and you just move on to another topic, that is not going to work at all. It will become extremely difficult to experience the benefit of being somebody who has many containers!

The **limbs of** knower of paths has a few divisions. We have looked at the freedom from the manifest pride and mind generation.

Another division of the limbs of knower of paths is called the nature of a knower of paths. Unlike the hearers and solitary realizers, the **bodhisattva superiors** do not mainly abandon the afflictions. Why? Because the afflictions in the mental continua of the bodhisattva superiors do not harm their practice of virtue and their activities to benefit sentient beings.

In the explanation of this section in the great treatises, there are many qualms and many dispelling of objections, with references to texts such as Haribhadra's commentary, *Clarifying the Meaning* and so forth.

At the end of all this discussion, it can be summarised in this way. What does it mean when we say that the bodhisattva superiors do not mainly abandon the afflictions? The bodhisattva superiors do not have the attachment of the desire realm and the attachment of the form realm as their main objects of abandonment. Their main objects of abandonment are ignorance, the view of the transitory collections and pride. Why is this so? The bodhisattva superiors take rebirth in cyclic existence due to their level of the predispositions of ignorance and their uncontaminated karma. When they take rebirth in cyclic existence, desire and attachment are utilized as conditions for them to work for sentient beings.

The bodhisattva superiors are unlike the hearers and solitary realizers. The hearers and solitary realizers enter into meditative equipoise in the final peace of nirvana. The bodhisattva superiors do not do that because their main goal is to work for the benefit of all sentient beings. They are always working for sentient beings with the skilful means that is supported by wisdom. As such, they do not enter into the peace of nirvana like the hearers and solitary realizers do.

### ~ 2. *Knower of paths that knows hearers' paths*

Why is there a knower of path that knows the hearers' paths? As I mentioned before, in order for the bodhisattva superiors to benefit the disciples or trainees of the different lineages like the hearers and solitary realizers, they must experience those paths for themselves. They do not only know these paths but they have generated these paths within their own continuum. They then teach them to others. As such, there is a knower of paths that knows hearers' paths.

### ~ 3. *Knower of paths that knows solitary realizers' paths*

Since the knower of paths is generated after having cultivated the paths of the hearers, solitary realizers and bodhisattvas in one's own continuum, therefore, there is a knower of paths that knows solitary realizers' paths.

In the explanation of these two topics (topics #2 & #3), there is an explanation of the differences between a hearer and a solitary realizer. These two are not the same. A solitary realizer is superior to a hearer. There are six or seven characteristics that make a solitary realizer superior to a hearer. We will not go into them now.

~ 4. *Mahayana path of seeing*

There is a knower of paths that knows the Mahayana path. As such, the fourth topic is the Mahayana path of seeing.

If we look at the order of topics two, three and four in terms of their inferiority and superiority, we can see that the presentation starts with a knower of paths that knows hearers' paths, followed by a knower of paths that knows solitary realizers' paths. The solitary realizers' paths are superior to the hearers' paths. Then there is the knower of paths that knows the Mahayana path.

If we look at the Mahayana path of seeing, there are the eight forbearances and the eight knowledges.

- The forbearances are the uninterrupted paths, which are the antidotes to the path of seeing abandonments that are included in the three realms.
- The knowledges are the path of release. When one abandons the afflictions of the three realms, which are the path of seeing abandonments, then one achieves the path of release.

~ 5. *Function of the Mahayana path of meditation*

After the Mahayana path of seeing comes the Mahayana path of meditation. Before discussing the Mahayana path of meditation, we have topic #5, the function (or the result) of the Mahayana path of meditation.

Why is the result of the Mahayana path of meditation presented here? Because when we know what the positive results of the Mahayana path of meditation are if we were to meditate on and cultivate it, then we will be inspired to enter the Mahayana path of meditation. This topic refers to the beneficial qualities that are attained through the force of cultivating the Mahayana path of meditation.

There are six of beneficial qualities and I thought perhaps it may be beneficial for us to go through them:

- The first beneficial quality is a thorough pacification of the mind. The words "thorough pacification of the mind" actually appear in the sutras. The "thorough pacification" mentioned in the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Twenty Thousand Verses* is related to this topic. "Thorough pacification" and freedom from pride are taken to be the same thing so it means the complete pacification of pride.
- **The second beneficial quality** is that as the result of this "thorough pacification," externally one is respectful towards all beings. Here, the text says, "bowing to all beings." Due to this internal pacification of the mind, when this bodhisattva superior engages in the practice of giving, externally he is very respectful of everyone while giving and is able to make his practice of generosity pure. At the same time, he is able to non-objectify the three spheres (or the three circles). This means that he is able to give while recollecting that the giver, the recipient of the gift and the gift itself are all empty of existing truly. It is mentioned in the text that these bodhisattva superiors bow to all beings as if they were their virtuous friends, their own gurus.

The point is that if there were no pride within, one would not give with pride. Because of this internal pacification, one does not practise generosity in an ostentatious way.

- The third beneficial quality attained through the force of cultivating the Mahayana path of meditation is “victory in the battle against the afflictive emotions.” This means that the bodhisattva superiors are victorious in their battle against the three poisons. If you look at sutras like the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, which this text is trying to explain, you will find words like “these bodhisattva superiors gain victory over the arrow of attachment.”

In the text *Abhisamayalamkara*, the *Ornament for Clear Realization*, the words “victory over the afflictions” are used. Haribhadra says in his commentary, *Clarifying the Meaning*, that these bodhisattva superiors outshine or overwhelm the afflictions such as attachment and so forth. In this context, outshine or overwhelm here does not mean destroy.

You should not forget what I had said earlier. In the text, it is mentioned in that context that the bodhisattva superiors do not abandon the afflictions mainly. Can you draw some relationship between that and what I have just quoted from Haribhadra?

- Because of outshining or overwhelming the afflictions such as attachment and so forth, there comes the fourth beneficial quality of these bodhisattva superiors, “never being dominated by the harm of suffering.” It is said in the sutras that the bodhisattva superiors can never be harmed by poison, i.e., even if you try to poison them, the poison doesn’t work. If you try to cut them up into pieces with whatever weapons you have at hand, they don’t work. If you put them in fire, they cannot be burnt. If you try to drown them in water, they cannot be drowned. If you try to place curses on them, they cannot be harmed.

In the *Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, there is a dialogue between Avalokiteshvara and Shariputra. Likewise, in some of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*, there is also a dialogue between like the king of the gods, Indra, and an individual called Goshika and so forth. In the sutra, it is stated that somebody said that these bodhisattvas cannot be harmed by poison, weapons, fire, water or curses. Then another person asked, “Why is it that these bodhisattva superiors are not harmed by poison, weapons, fire, water, curses and so forth?” The answer is that this is due to the knowledge mantra of the perfection of wisdom.

What is the perfection of wisdom? A few lessons ago, I had spoken briefly of what the perfection of wisdom is. Here, in the context of the answer given, it is the path perfection of wisdom even though the path perfection of wisdom is not the actual perfection of wisdom, i.e., it is not the highest or final perfection of wisdom.

The perfection of wisdom here refers to the path perfection of wisdom, i.e., the wisdom directly realizing emptiness. Specifically, it is a knower of paths that realizes

emptiness directly. Due to this wisdom, these special bodhisattvas cannot be harmed.

It is said in the *Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* that

... the mantra of the perfection of wisdom, the mantra of great knowledge, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequalled, the mantra that thoroughly pacifies all suffering, should be known as truth, since it is not false.

There are these five characteristics. In the context of relating them to the answer—the knowledge mantra of the perfection of wisdom—the perfection of wisdom here refers to the path perfection of wisdom, the knower of paths that knows the Mahayana path. If one possesses the path perfection of wisdom, one will cross over to the other shore.

- The path perfection of wisdom is the antidote to ignorance. It can overcome ignorance. As such, it is “the mantra of great knowledge,” knowledge being the opposite of ignorance.
- The path perfection of wisdom is “the unsurpassed mantra” because by depending on the path perfection of wisdom, one can achieve the unsurpassed non-abiding nirvana.
- The path perfection of wisdom is “the mantra equal to the unequalled.” The unequalled here refers to the Buddha. The path perfection of wisdom is the method that enables one to become equal to the unequalled.
- The path perfection of wisdom is the unparalleled solution to all sufferings. As such, it is “the mantra that thoroughly pacifies all suffering.”
- It is the mantra that knows the truth. Why? Because the path perfection of wisdom sees the ultimate nature of reality. It sees emptiness directly. Reality is no different from how it is seen by the path perfection of wisdom.

The word “mantra” in the *Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* does not refer to the mantra we recite. Rather in the context of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*, mantra refers to the path perfection of wisdom.

We discussed how the bodhisattva superiors cannot be harmed by weapons, fire and so forth. This is quite clear when we think about it. The mantra is the perfection of wisdom and, in this context, the path perfection of wisdom. It is a wisdom that directly realizes emptiness. Not only that, it is the wisdom directly realizing emptiness that is conjoined with the mind generation. So when the bodhisattva achieves the wisdom directly realizing emptiness, as he already has bodhicitta, that bodhisattva superior is able to outshine or overwhelm the afflictions such as desire, attachment and so forth. He pacifies these afflictions. Because he has gained control over his mind internally, externally, he cannot be harmed.

- The fifth beneficial quality attained through the force of cultivating the Mahayana path of meditation is that the bodhisattva superiors will possess the ability to

achieve enlightenment. I guess at this point, the bodhisattva superiors possess an extraordinary and very powerful mind generation. As such, they possess the ability to achieve enlightenment.

- The final and sixth beneficial quality is that the place where a bodhisattva superior on the path of meditation resides becomes a support for worship. Due to their extraordinary mind generation, the bodhisattva superiors on the path of meditation become so powerful that they bless the place where they reside so that they become places of worship, worthy of honour, homage, offerings and so forth.

You will recall a while back, we had discussed whether there was any real benefit in just cultivating the good heart and meditating on bodhicitta without offering any practical benefit for sentient beings. I think you can use this sixth benefit as an example of the benefit of simply cultivating bodhicitta. Of course, we are not talking about just any bodhisattva. We are referring to a bodhisattva on the path of meditation whose mind generation is so powerful that he blesses the place where he is. It is an environmental result of his meditation on bodhicitta and his mind generation.

What comes after the fifth topic? It is an explanation on the Mahayana path of meditation in terms of the contaminated Mahayana path of meditation and the uncontaminated Mahayana path of meditation.

What is the basis or support for generating the Mahayana path of meditation? The basis here refers to the kind of life or body that one must possess before one can generate the Mahayana path of meditation directly. Among the three realms, it is the life or body of the desire realm. Within the desire realm, there are humans and gods so they are the basis or support for generating the Mahayana path of meditation.

Both males and females can generate the Mahayana path of meditation. It is also said in the teachings that the support for generating the path of seeing is a male body. The Buddha said this in the sutras.

However, if one is in the form realm or the formless realm, then there is no way to generate the Mahayana path of meditation.

The support that directly produces the Mahayana path of meditation is a body of or life in the desire realm. Why is this so? The support for the actual production of the Mahayana path of meditation must also be the support for the production of the Mahayana path of seeing. The support included in the form realm cannot be the support for the production of the Mahayana path of seeing. This is the reason.

Why can't one generate the path of seeing in the form realm? According to Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge*, the beings in the form and formless realms either have very little or lack disenchantment completely. Therefore, they are not able to develop the path of seeing in their mind.



The desire realm is a support for generating the path of seeing because in the desire realm, one can generate a great deal of disenchantment. Therefore, the basis or support that can actually bring about the generation of the path of seeing is a desire realm body.

You may then start to wonder about the path of preparation. Does that mean that the path of preparation cannot be generated in the form and formless realms either? There are four levels to the path of preparation. One cannot generate the supreme mundane quality level of the path of preparation with a form realm existence or body as a support. Why? Because when one moves from the supreme mundane quality level to the path of seeing, one does so within one meditative equipoise.

It is mentioned in the texts that there are some individuals who achieves the heat and the peak levels of the path of preparation in a form realm body. This is clear. What is uncertain is what happens on the third level, called forbearance, of the path of preparation. We need to think about this using reasoning to establish whether one can actually achieve the forbearance level of the path of preparation with a form realm body.

Are there bodhisattva superiors in the form realm? The answer is yes. Are there bodhisattva superiors in the formless realm? The answer is no.

Many of you here have finished studying the lam-rim so here is a question for you now: In the formless realm, are there individuals there who generate bodhicitta? Whether your answer is yes or no, you have to cite the scriptural authority and/or your reasoning?

In the lam-rim, in the section on the perfect human rebirth with its freedoms and endowments, one of the eight freedoms is the freedom of being a long life god. It is mentioned very clearly in the lam-rim literature that a long life god **refers to a god** who is at the level of the fourth concentration in the form realm. The form realm is divided into the four concentrations. Within the land of the four concentrations, there is a section of the fourth concentration where there is this god. The freedom from being a long life god refers to the freedom from being this god in this particular area in the land of the fourth concentration of the form realm.

It is also mentioned in the lam-rim that the long life god includes ordinary beings of the formless realm. They also lack this freedom and are in an inopportune state.

So a long life god refers to these two beings:

- the particular god abiding in a specific section of the fourth concentration in the form realm
- the ordinary beings in the formless realm

The lam-rim does not say that *all* beings in the formless realm lack this freedom. It refers specifically to all *ordinary* beings in the formless realm. Does this imply anything?

(Student's response is inaudible).

Anyway, this is something for you all to think about.

This is an example of why we need to know the words of the text. From this, you can see that the words are there to serve a specific purpose. In this case again, the question is: Why doesn't the lam-rim mention the freedom from being reborn in the formless realm? Instead, it says freedom from being an ordinary being in the formless realm.

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