

**Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on the
Heart Sutra and Stages of the Path (the Six Perfections)****Lesson 3****2 July 2013**

Continuation of the path of seeing. Uninterrupted paths and paths of release. Abandonments on the path of meditation. Perfections on the ten grounds. Special qualities of the bodhisattvas.

Question: At which point does the Hinayana arhats, who have attained liberation and are convinced by the Buddha to enter the Mahayana path, enter the Mahayana path?

Answer: This is very straightforward. There is nothing difficult about this. They enter through the door! Prior to entering the Mahayana path, these arhats have not generated bodhicitta yet. When they generate the uncontrived bodhicitta, they enter the Mahayana path through the Mahayana small path of accumulation.

[Question from student is inaudible].

Answer: Of course these arhats already have the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness. But it is difficult to say whether, due to having that realisation, they will travel faster along the various paths to enlightenment. This is not clearly stated in the Great Treatises. What they need to do still is to accumulate the collections in order to achieve enlightenment.

In general, this takes three great countless eons. When these arhats enter the Mahayana path, while they are on the Mahayana path of accumulation and the Mahayana path of preparation, they have to accumulate the collections over the first great countless eons.

You must not mix up what I am saying here now with what I have covered so far. What we covered in class is from the perspective of someone who enters the Mahayana path from the very beginning. It is *not* from the perspective of someone who has completed the Hinayana path and then enters the Mahayana path. Your question is related to arhats who have already completed the Hinayana path and who are now entering the Mahayana path. Their mode of progression and so forth is different.

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The paths of the Mahayana superior consist of:

1. the Mahayana path of seeing
2. the Mahayana path of meditation
3. the Mahayana path of no more learning

**PATH OF SEEING**

A person becomes a bodhisattva superior when he enters the Mahayana path of seeing. Prior to that, on the Mahayana path of preparation, the ordinary bodhisattva

meditates on emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality, via a meaning generality of emptiness. When the ordinary bodhisattva perceives emptiness directly for the first time, he enters the Mahayana path of seeing. At that time:

- He becomes a Mahayana superior.
- He becomes a Sangha Jewel; specifically, the ultimate Sangha Jewel.
- He possesses the Dharma Jewel in his mental continuum.

~ *Sangha Jewel and Dharma Jewel*

The ultimate Sangha Jewel is the real Sangha Jewel. Anyone who possesses the Dharma Jewel in his mental continuum is an ultimate Sangha Jewel. Conventionally speaking, a Sangha is constituted of four fully ordained monks but this is not required here. In this case, as long as the person is a superior being, that person is the real Sangha Jewel, the ultimate Sangha Jewel. When you think about this, it then becomes apparent that an ultimate Sangha Jewel need not be an ordained person. We usually think of the Sangha in terms of monks and nuns. But here it is clear that even a lay person who has directly perceived emptiness is an ultimate Sangha Jewel.

When the bodhisattva realises emptiness directly for the first time, his wisdom directly perceiving emptiness becomes an actual antidote to the afflictions because it can counteract and destroy them. The wisdom directly perceiving emptiness in the continuum of this bodhisattva is the Dharma Jewel and is the true path.

Simultaneous with perceiving emptiness directly for the first time, the bodhisattva achieves the first ground called “Very Joyful.” It is said that, at this time, the bodhisattva feels that his enlightenment is certain, that he is definitely going to be enlightened.

~ *Uninterrupted paths and paths of release*

The bodhisattva enters the Mahayana path of seeing while in meditative equipoise. It is in meditative equipoise that he directly perceives emptiness. At the same time, this wisdom directly perceiving emptiness becomes powerful enough to act as a direct antidote to the afflictions. Such a mind is called an *uninterrupted path*.

An uninterrupted path is not simply a wisdom directly perceiving emptiness. It is a specific kind of wisdom in meditative equipoise; a wisdom directly perceiving emptiness that can act as the actual antidote to the afflictions.

Referring to the chart<sup>1</sup>, there is an uninterrupted path on the Mahayana path of seeing. This uninterrupted path acts as an actual antidote to only certain kinds of afflictions.

In general, afflictions can be divided into two:

1. the afflictions that are abandoned by the Mahayana path of seeing
2. the afflictions that are abandoned by the Mahayana path of meditation

Of the two, the uninterrupted path of the Mahayana path of seeing acts as an actual

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to chart on *The Five Mahayana Paths* that can be downloaded from <http://www.fpmtabc.org/download/teaching/geshe-chonyi/bp/heartsutra/Handout/>.

antidote to the path of seeing abandonments, i.e., the intellectually acquired afflictions. When you compare the intellectually acquired afflictions to the innate afflictions, the intellectually acquired afflictions are coarser.

When the intellectually acquired afflictions are abandoned, they are destroyed. This happens during meditative equipoise. At that time, that mind is given the name, *the path of release*.

Put simply, there is an uninterrupted path and a path of release associated with each of the ten grounds. In general:

- An uninterrupted path refers to the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness that acts as an actual antidote to any of the afflictions.
- The path of release refers to the mind that has been freed from any of the afflictions.

These two paths—the uninterrupted path and the path of release—both occur in meditative equipoise:

- During the meditative equipoise directly focusing on emptiness, when the mind is capable of acting as an actual antidote to the afflictions, that meditative equipoise is called an uninterrupted path.
- When the respective afflictions are already abandoned, for the duration of that single session of meditative equipoise, that meditative equipoise is called the path of release.

In general, this is how the bodhisattvas progress in terms of abandoning the afflictions. It is like the two halves of a soccer game; one continuous game but split into two halves.

- The uninterrupted path and the path of release are both wisdoms of meditative equipoise. When the bodhisattvas arise from meditative equipoise, they enter the post-meditative equipoise during which activities are carried out and they actualise the post-equipoise wisdom.
- Then they enter again into the next meditative equipoise that consist of an uninterrupted path and a path of release.
- Again they arise from that meditative equipoise into the post meditative-equipoise. This is how the bodhisattvas move along the paths and the ten grounds and progress towards full enlightenment. This is like us going to sleep, then waking up and going to sleep again. Through progressing along the ten grounds, they gradually abandon the obscurations. First, they abandon the afflictive obscurations and then they go on to abandon the knowledge obscurations.

~ *Summary*

1. When the bodhisattva realises emptiness directly for the first time, his wisdom directly perceiving emptiness becomes an uninterrupted path that can act as the actual antidote to the intellectually acquired afflictions.
2. Then, in that same meditative equipoise, he achieves the path of release when the intellectually acquired afflictions are completely abandoned.
3. When he arises from that meditative equipoise, he achieves the post-equipoise wisdom of the first ground.

**PATH OF MEDITATION**

During the post-meditative equipoise, the bodhisattva strives in amassing a huge collection of merit in order to be able to abandon the path of meditation abandonments, the innate afflictions.

~ *Abandoning the innate afflictions*

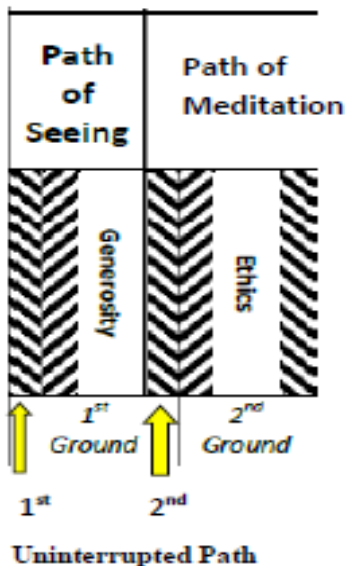
The innate afflictions that are abandoned by the Mahayana path of meditation are categorised into three types:

1. the big innate afflictions
2. the middling innate afflictions
3. the small innate afflictions

These three are further divided into three each.

|                                                                                    |          |                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|
| <b>PATH OF MEDITATION ABANDONMENTS:</b><br><br><b>LEVELS OF INNATE AFFLICTIONS</b> | Big      | 1 Big of the big           |
|                                                                                    |          | 2 Middling of the big      |
|                                                                                    |          | 3 Small of the big         |
|                                                                                    | Middling | 4 Big of the middling      |
|                                                                                    |          | 5 Middling of the middling |
|                                                                                    |          | 6 Small of the middling    |
|                                                                                    | Small    | 7 Big of the small         |
|                                                                                    |          | 8 Middling of the small    |
|                                                                                    |          | 9 Small of the small       |

This makes a total of nine objects of abandonments or nine levels of innate afflictions that are abandoned by the Mahayana path of meditation. For the sake of simplicity, we are basing our discussions on the chart<sup>2</sup> and not on the handout notes<sup>3</sup>.



Comes the time when, in meditative equipoise, the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness of the bodhisattva becomes powerful enough to act as the actual antidote to the big of the big innate afflictions, that wisdom directly perceiving emptiness is the first ground uninterrupted path of the path of meditation.

According to the chart, on the first ground, there are *two* uninterrupted paths. The second uninterrupted path is the first ground uninterrupted path of the path of meditation that is the actual antidote to the big of the big innate afflictions. When the big of the big innate afflictions are abandoned, the bodhisattva achieves the path of release. This path of release is the second ground path of release where the big of the big innate afflictions are abandoned.

We do not have time to go through every single ground. By the time the bodhisattva achieves the path of release of the seventh ground, he has already abandoned the

<sup>2</sup> Ven. Gyurme clarified that there are other views on the presentation of the paths and grounds.

<sup>3</sup> The handout titled *Mahayana Paths and Grounds according to the Consequence Middle Way School* found at the same link indicated in footnote (1).

three levels of the big afflictions and the three levels of the middling afflictions.

Based on this chart, the seventh ground uninterrupted path acts as the direct antidote to all three levels of the small afflictions: the big of the small, the middling of the small and the small of the small.

When the bodhisattva achieves the eighth ground path of release, the bodhisattva is completely liberated from all the afflictions. All the afflictions have been destroyed in his mind. This milestone is labelled “H” in the chart. At this point in time, the bodhisattva becomes an arhat or foe destroyer. He is totally liberated from the afflictive obscurations.

~ *Abandoning the knowledge obscurations*

If you remember our discussion from the previous module on tenets, afflictive obscurations are not necessarily afflictions. Prior to abandoning the afflictive obscurations, the bodhisattva is not able to act on abandoning the knowledge obscurations. After achieving the eighth ground path of release, the bodhisattva enters into the post-meditative equipoise of the eighth ground. During this post meditative equipoise, the bodhisattva accumulates a huge collection of merit. When his wisdom directly perceiving emptiness becomes powerful enough to act as the actual antidote to the knowledge obscurations, that wisdom becomes the eighth ground uninterrupted path. It is only when the eighth ground uninterrupted path is actualised does the work on abandoning the knowledge obscurations begin.

This particular chart shows an uninterrupted path for the eighth, ninth and tenth grounds. These three uninterrupted paths are the actual antidotes to the knowledge obscurations. There are three uninterrupted paths that are the actual antidotes to the knowledge obscurations because the knowledge obscurations are also divided into three levels:

1. big knowledge obscurations
2. middling knowledge obscurations
3. small knowledge obscurations

When the small knowledge obscurations are abandoned, the bodhisattva becomes a buddha and achieves the Mahayana path of no more learning.

My explanation so far has been based on this chart, so you should try to understand my explanation based on this chart. What I explained differs slightly from what is presented in the notes. If you are interested, you can also look at the notes but only after you have understood the explanation that I had given based on this chart. Then if you are interested, you should look at the notes. You will find some differences. If you are interested, perhaps you can think of the reasons why there are these differences, the reasons for the differences and so forth. You can analyse this and discuss it with each other.

## **THE PERFECTIONS ON THE TEN GROUNDS**

Each of the ten grounds is associated with a perfection.

| <b>THE PERFECTIONS ON THE TEN GROUNDS</b> |                              |
|-------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| First ground                              | Perfection of generosity     |
| Second ground                             | Perfection of ethics         |
| Third ground                              | Perfection of patience       |
| Fourth ground                             | Perfection of joyous effort  |
| Fifth ground                              | Perfection of concentration  |
| Sixth ground                              | Perfection of wisdom         |
| Seventh ground                            | Perfection of method         |
| Eighth ground                             | Perfection of prayer         |
| Ninth ground                              | Perfection of power          |
| Tenth ground                              | Perfection of exalted wisdom |

On each of the grounds, the bodhisattva acquires very special qualities associated with those perfections. On the first ground, the bodhisattva achieves a very special form of the practice of generosity. Then on the second ground, he achieves very special qualities and practices associated with ethics and so forth.

### **SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THE BODHISATTVAS**

At each of these grounds, the bodhisattva achieves many very special qualities. I think there are twelve distinctive qualities. For example, on the first ground, the bodhisattva, in a single moment:

- can enter into a hundred concentrations
- can see a hundred buddhas
- can travel to a hundred pure lands
- is able to emanate and send out a hundred replicas of himself

These qualities are further enhanced on the second ground. On the second ground, the bodhisattva, in a single moment:

- can enter into a thousand concentrations
- can see a thousand buddhas
- can travel to a thousand pure lands
- can manifest a thousand emanations

On the third ground, these qualities are further enhanced. On the third ground, the bodhisattva, in a single moment:

- can enter into a hundred thousand concentrations
- can see a hundred thousand buddhas
- can travel to a hundred thousand pure lands
- can manifest a hundred thousand emanations

Such qualities are increased as the bodhisattvas progress on each ground. By the time they are on the tenth ground, in one moment, they can enter countless concentrations, see an unbelievable number of buddhas, travel to innumerable pure lands and manifest innumerable emanations. These bodhisattvas on the tenth ground do all this for the purpose of purifying their obscurations, accumulating merit and working for sentient beings.

When you look at how hard these bodhisattva superiors work in order to accumulate merit, then at our level, you know how important it is for us to accumulate merit.

Now that you have heard this brief explanation of how one becomes a buddha, you will realise that achieving enlightenment is no easy task. You have to think about what it means to be a buddha. In short, in order to achieve enlightenment, to become a buddha, you have to abandon all the obscurations: the afflictive obscurations and the knowledge obscurations. One has to work very hard to accumulate the merit and to abandon these obscurations.

The work starts right from the beginning after one has generated bodhicitta and entered the Mahayana path of accumulation. At the Mahayana path of accumulation, one focuses on the accumulation of the collections and on hearing and reflection in order to generate the realisation of emptiness.

On the Mahayana path of preparation, one meditates on whatever ascertainment or realisation of emptiness one has in order to derive the wisdom arisen from meditation. The meditation on emptiness on the path of preparation is done primarily, at this time, to counteract the manifest conception of true existence. Still one has not realised emptiness directly yet. Therefore one does not have the actual antidote to the afflictions.

When the bodhisattva is able to see emptiness directly for the first time, he enters the Mahayana path of seeing. Only then does he have the actual antidote to the afflictions. The afflictions that are first abandoned are the intellectually acquired afflictions. Only when the intellectually acquired afflictions are abandoned can the work of abandoning the innate afflictions begin.

When the bodhisattva starts to work on abandoning the innate afflictions, these afflictions are not abandoned all at once. The bodhisattva has to abandon nine levels of innate afflictions. It is a long process. Only after that is the bodhisattva free from the afflictive obscurations.

Still the work is not finished. There still remain the knowledge obscurations to be abandoned. Only after abandoning the afflictive obscurations can the work of abandoning the knowledge obscurations begin. The bodhisattva gradually abandons the knowledge obscurations by progressing on the eighth, ninth and tenth grounds.

When the small knowledge obscurations are abandoned, the bodhisattva becomes a buddha, the fully enlightened one.

From this you can see that a buddha is an extraordinary being. It is difficult for us even to imagine the qualities the bodhisattvas are said to achieve on the first to the tenth ground. Maybe we can accept 100 emanations but thousands, millions of emanations? We will probably have a mental block, especially when we think about the bodhisattvas on the tenth ground. The number of emanations they can send out is akin to numberless. How you are going to put a figure to it?

If the tenth ground bodhisattva is so powerful, can you imagine what a buddha can do? What a buddha is capable of is completely beyond the scope of ordinary thought. It is inconceivable! Even with this rough understanding of the mode of progress on the paths and grounds and what it takes to be a buddha, you should be able to see

that a buddha is by no means an ordinary being. You can imagine and at least have some feeling of what being a buddha means. So now when you think of the Buddha, you can really appreciate who the Buddha is. His qualities are truly inconceivable! This is when you generate conviction and faith in the Buddha.

*Khen Rinpoche: Is there anything else you need explained regarding the chart? You are all clear about the chart? Only this chart, not another chart. If you don't understand anything regarding this chart, ask now.*

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Question: After the ordinary bodhisattva attains the uncontrived bodhicitta, why does the chart still refer to aspiring bodhicitta (under "Effortless Bodhicitta" at milestone "A")?

Answer: When you look at the ritual for adopting bodhicitta, in terms of the order, it is a step by step process.

- One generates the aspirational mind generation that involves generating the thought, "I will achieve enlightenment in order to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings." Here one is merely generating such an aspiration. This does *not* come with a commitment.
- Next is generating the aspirational bodhicitta with a commitment. This involves making the pledge or commitment never to give up the aspiration to achieve full enlightenment for others.
- Only then does one take the bodhisattva vow. This is the engaging (or engaged) mind generation or engaging bodhicitta. When one takes the bodhisattva vow, on top of the earlier pledge never to give up the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, one is making the pledge or vow to practise according to the deeds of the bodhisattvas, i.e., the six perfections.

When you are training to develop bodhicitta, the training is all about effort. Therefore it is contrived because it requires effort. First you train the mind in order to generate the thought, "I will achieve full enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings." Based on that, the next step is to make a pledge never to give up that aspiration. But this is still contrived as it takes effort for you do this.

When the thought to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings is uncontrived, i.e., it arises effortlessly, that is the time when you become a bodhisattva. That is the time when you have uncontrived bodhicitta.

When an individual actualises uncontrived bodhicitta, he becomes a bodhisattva. The uncontrived bodhicitta that he generates, the fully qualified bodhicitta consists of two parts: aspirational bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta. In terms of the mind generation, there are the aspirational mind generation and engaging mind generation.

This is not to be confused with what I have said earlier about generating the thought to achieve enlightenment in general, then making a pledge and then taking the bodhisattva vow. This is not the same thing.

If the question is about the difference between aspirational bodhicitta and engaged bodhicitta, a different answer will be required.

Khen Rinpoche: When you are confused, it is a sign that you are thinking more. When you are not confused, you are not thinking.

Question: The general understanding is that the two collections refer to the collection of merit and wisdom. From the first lesson, my understanding is that the first collection is for the ordinary bodhisattva and the second collection is for the arya bodhisattva. Is this correct?

Answer: When we say accumulating the two collections—the collection of merit and the collection of wisdom—these two collections are not done separately. They are done in unison from the beginning of the Mahayana path starting from the path of accumulation all the way up to the end of the path of meditation. It is not that the ordinary bodhisattva only accumulates the collection of merit and the bodhisattva superior only accumulates the collection of wisdom. It is not like that.

Question: I do not understand the meaning of forbearance in the path of preparation. Why is it called forbearance?

Answer: It has to do with the language. This term works in Tibetan but may seem odd in English. The point is that the bodhisattva on the forbearance stage of the path of preparation acquires the confidence that he will never be reborn in the lower realms. Literally in Tibetan it means he “acquires” forbearance.

Pertaining to the chart, you can go home and think about it. If you have any questions, you can bring it up in class. I will start on the *Heart of the Perfection Sutra* in the next lesson.



Note: The following table is a summary of lesson 3 and does not cover the entire paths and grounds.

PATHS OF BODHISATTVA SUPERIOR		
PATH OF SEEING	First Ground: Very Joyful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One newly realises emptiness directly. • One becomes a Mahayana superior. • One becomes a bodhisattva superior. • One becomes the ultimate Sangha Jewel. • One possesses the Dharma Jewel, the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness in one’s mental continuum. • This wisdom directly perceiving emptiness in meditative equipoise is the uninterrupted path of the Mahayana path of seeing that acts as the direct antidote to the intellectually acquired afflictions, the path of seeing abandonments. • When, in meditative equipoise, the intellectually acquired afflictions are destroyed and completely abandoned, at that time, that mind is the path of release.

PATHS OF BODHISATTVA SUPERIOR		
PATH OF MEDITATION	First ground uninterrupted path of the path of meditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bodhisattva enters this path when he has accumulated sufficient merit. • It is the direct antidote to the big of the big innate afflictions.
	Second ground path of release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The big of the big innate afflictions are abandoned.
	Second to sixth grounds uninterrupted paths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These uninterrupted paths are the antidotes to the middling of the big up to the small of the middling levels of innate afflictions.
	Seventh ground uninterrupted path	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the direct antidote to all three levels of the small afflictions: the big of the small, the middling of the small and the small of the small.
	Eighth ground path of release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All the small innate afflictions are abandoned and the bodhisattva is now liberated from all the afflictive obscurations.
	Eighth ground uninterrupted path	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the direct antidote to the big knowledge obscurations.
	Ninth ground uninterrupted path	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the direct antidote to the middling knowledge obscurations.
	Tenth ground uninterrupted path	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the direct antidote to the small knowledge obscurations.

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