

## **Transcript of the oral commentary by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum of the Mahayana, Chapter One: The Tathagata Essence***

**Root verses** from *The Tathagata Essence: Great Vehicle Treatise on the Sublime Continuum Differentiating the Lineage of the Three Jewels (mahayanottaratantra-ratnagotravibhanga)* by Maitreya, translation Jeffrey Hopkins and Joe B. Wilson, Draft, January 2007, © Hopkins and Wilson, with permission for use in FPMT Basic Programs.

Oral commentary based on Gyaltsab Je's Commentary to the First Chapter, translated by Gavin Kilty (*The Tathagata Essence, Commentary to the First Chapter* by Gyaltsap Darma Rinchen © FPMT, Inc. January 2007).

### **Lesson 15**

**9 April 2015**

---

Buddha lineage according to the four Buddhist tenets.

---

*Question:* The Sangha Jewel possesses the knowledge of the mode of phenomena because it directly perceives the clear light nature of the mind and that afflictions are adventitious. Is a true path then essentially a direct realisation of the clear light nature of the mind?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Yes.

*Question:* Is the wisdom of subsequent attainment the mind that realises the varieties of phenomena?

*Answer:* Yes.

*Question:* What kind of mind is that? Among the seven types of mind we learnt in *Lorig*, I am wondering which one it is.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Why do you wonder?

*Student 1:* Are we not supposed to wonder?

*Khen Rinpoche:* If you say you are wondering, when I answer yes, immediately you must have something to say. Otherwise, you are not wondering. Wondering means that if I said yes to your question, you must say something in response. Yes or no, whatever I say, you have to say something. But when I ask you further, you just keep quiet. Then you are not wondering.

*This topic is difficult. Are you enjoying it or feeling bored? You want to challenge*

*yourself or not? It is challenging for me too. (Laughs). It is even more challenging than when I was studying. It is really difficult even for me.*

*At the same time, you can't say, "I don't understand," because it depends on how much effort you put in. So you must be realistic with regard to what you can understand. If you hear the teachings once and you expect to understand everything, then that is not possible. Even when I read the text ten times, I still don't get everything. So this is not an easy topic.*

*In the monastery, we had many different teachers, not just one teacher. Each teacher taught differently. We read. We memorised. We had to put in a lot of effort. For example, the qualities of the Sangha Jewel, the Buddha Jewel and so forth. In the monastery, we had to memorise every single word.*

*Of course here we are not studying in that way but we should try our best to understand the meaning as much as possible. You need to read the transcripts repeatedly, maybe ten, twenty times.*

*Do not think it is like reading the Diamond Cutter Sutra or the Sanghata Sutra. I am not referring to that type of reading. But here, take your time to read, think about what you have read, then ask questions. I think even reading this text needs a lot of effort on your part.*

*In the first Basic Program, at that time, I talked a lot, encouraging the students to study. I know this topic is difficult. But if you really want to study, if you have the strong wish to study, I think you need to put in more effort. Reading, listening, with the recognition that this is something important. Some of the quotations, parts of the root text should be memorised. But it is difficult I know. What you are learning here is almost, more or less, like what monks studying to be geshe are studying.*

*Even the words are difficult. Some of the Tibetan words are difficult even for me. Even the commentaries are difficult. Sometimes I don't know what they are talking about, what they are getting at.*

*Then when you translate into English, of course, the words and the terms used are totally new to you. In the first place, you are not getting the words. Secondly, you are not getting their meaning. So I understand the challenge is there. But as I have mentioned before, you should get the words first. The words, whatever they may be, should be memorised. Then after that, the second thing is to understand the meaning of the words. So first, you are just learning the words. After that, you learn their meaning. So it is important to put in some effort.*

*Last time, I used to talk a lot. That is how we came to have this book, Daily Reflections. But for this Basic Program, I thought maybe there was no need to talk so much. Anyway from what I can see, the first batch of students and this group are different.*

*When I started the first Basic Program, most of the students have already been with ABC for a long time. But among this group, many people are new to ABC and are mainly beginners. So there is bound to be some challenges and difficulties.*

*But what I am saying is that if you really want to study, then you need to put in some effort. You need to read the root text, all the transcripts and so forth. If you read the text five, ten times, you will get something out of it. So do put in some effort.*

*Of course, as I mentioned before, sometimes when we don't understand, we also need to do some prayers. There are many obstacles so sometimes, you may feel discouraged and you stop coming for classes. Then you lose all the opportunities to study. So you need to make prayers all the time.*

*I have mentioned before that for me the prayers work. When I was studying in Sera, every morning, when we had puja at 5.30 am, I would go to the gumpa and the first thing I did was to go to the altar, seeing all the holy objects and the Hayagriva statue there. Then I made a strong prayer every morning for success in my studies. I did that all the time. Every morning I would go to pray like that. For me, that helped me to continue and to complete my studies.*

*So here we need to make strong prayers also. Each time you make strong prayers, you are encouraging yourself to study more. Sometimes when you don't have the encouragement from such prayers, the moment you encounter some difficulties, you just stop. Once you stop, it is quite difficult to come back and to continue with your studies.*

*So it is extremely important not to break your class attendance, not to discontinue your studies and not to give up your interest in your studies. So for those of you who wish to study, then you must do this—make prayers, work hard and don't be discouraged. Of course, these topics are not easy, but you can achieve some understanding. Once you understand a little bit, you will be able to appreciate the Buddha's teachings so that means you are appreciating the Buddha. This is important. That is what I have mentioned before many times.*

~~~~~

*Today, I am going to try a slightly different approach. Maybe it will be better. I don't know. (Laughs). Sometimes I don't know how to make things simpler.*

## **BUDDHA LINEAGE ACCORDING TO THE FOUR TENETS**

When we talk about lineage or *rig* in Tibetan, what exactly is it? This depends on your perspective. You know there are different Buddhist tenets.

### *Great Exposition School (GES)*

According to the Vaibashikas or the proponents of the Great Exposition School (GES), lineage is the virtuous mental factor of non-attachment, which is the substantial cause for the realisations in the continuum of a superior. This is posited as the lineage and it can be explained as to how this lineage moves to the buddha ground.

The proponents of the GES are followers of and depend on the sutras so they cite the sutras. For example, in the Vinaya, which are the instructions for the ordained community:

- It is mentioned that contentment, the mind of no-need, is the superior's lineage. The import of that is basically non-attachment since contentment is non-attachment.
- It stipulates the number of articles, robes and so forth that one should have, the point being that one should be content with few needs.
- It says also being content with receiving alms is the lineage of the superiors. Again, the import is not to be attached to objects of enjoyment such as food and so forth.
- It mentions that one should be content with one's living abode and even the mattress one has, i.e., one should be content with a simple and humble abode.
- It says that abandonment and meditation is the lineage of the superior. Abandonment means abandoning the afflictions and then cultivating a liking for meditation.

In short, one should have contentment with regard to one's robes, place of abode and food. This means to have a mind of non-attachment, the mental factor of non-attachment and it is this mind that is the cause for the generation of realisations in the continuum of a superior.

The first three—being content with one's robes, one's abode and one's food—are the indirect causes for the generation of the qualities of realisations in the continuum of the superior.

The abandonment of the afflictions and the liking for meditation directly relate to the mental factor of non-attachment and these are the direct causes for the generation of realisations in the continuum of a superior. Living a simple and contented life—a life where one does not have much wants and needs—makes it possible for one to be able to strive in abandoning the afflictions and in one's meditation practice.

For the proponents of the GES, whether someone possesses the lineage or not depends very much on whether the things that we have mentioned exist in the person's mind:

- Does the person have few needs?
- Is the person content?
- Does the person have a liking for working with the afflictions and abandoning them?
- Does the person have a liking for meditation?

If these are present in the mind of a person, then the person is said to possess the lineage, which means to say that the GES does not assert that *all* sentient beings have the lineage.

From the perspective of the GES, how do you know whether a person has lineage or not? If a person has many needs, much desire and is not contented, obviously that person is nowhere near to becoming a buddha. As such, according to this view, most ordinary folks do not have the lineage.

There is some sense to this assertion of the GES. There is a point to living a simple contented life. This is important before you can even talk about enlightenment or becoming a buddha.

The case made by the GES is that the lineage is the mental factor of non-attachment, which is the cause for the generation of realisations in the continuum of a superior. When a person is contented—in the case of ordained people, with simple robes, simple food and a simple abode—that mind of contentment is helpful in turning away the concept of things belonging to ‘me,’ as being ‘mine, mine, mine’. It is said that the mind of contentment in relation to those three things can turn away the manifest apprehension of ‘mine’.

Without working with our attachment, without lessening and turning our back against desires and attachments, there is no way to be liberated from cyclic existence. As such, there is no way to become a buddha. The whole point is to turn our back to attachment and not to follow attachment from the beginning. In order to turn away attachment, we need to practise contentment. So in this case, if one is content and satisfied with simple clothes, food and abode, that can help in turning away manifest desire or attachment.

Here, when we talk about attachment or craving, it is either attachment to the ‘I’, the self or attachment to that which belongs to this ‘I’, i.e., attachment to that which is ‘mine’. By living a simple life with regards to those three things, one can turn away the manifest attachment or clinging to ‘mine’.

If we think about this well and are honest with ourselves, how is it possible to develop the qualities and realisations of a superior if we do not turn away from attachment? No matter how we look at it, there is no way we can achieve anything without giving up desire and attachment. If that is the case, then for a person who does not give up attachment or desire, how can we say that this person possesses the lineage of a superior? You need to think about this.

In a previous lesson, we had looked at the three types of persons, i.e., those who possess the different kinds of obscurations.

Within the first category—those who love samsara—there are those who love samsara and do not desire liberation even though they accept that liberation exists. But it doesn’t matter whether one accepts liberation or not. One may want liberation, but if one loves samsara, there is no way one can achieve liberation, no matter how much one may believe in its existence. Such people happily enter into samsara because they love samsara but there is no way to generate the realisations of a superior if one does not turn away from or give up attachment.

- As such, to be content with a simple life, specifically to have simple clothes, simple food and a simple abode, counteract the manifest attachment to ‘mine’.
- In order for something to be a lineage of a superior, it must be a producer of a realisation in the continuum of a superior. Having a liking for abandoning the afflictions and for meditation is that which enables the individual to overcome the attachment to the self once and for all.

Contentment arises from seeing that there is no point in having many possessions, that there is no point in having a life that is not simple. It is a mind of non-attachment. But contentment doesn’t happen just because one has nothing. Having

nothing doesn't mean that one is content. But contentment comes about through seeing that there is no point to having many possessions. Then one would have no issues and be happy to abandon such things and not cling to them. One will have a liking for a simple life, and a liking for abandoning attachment. One will like to meditate and through that one can cut, once and for all, the attachment to the self.

This makes so much sense and is summarised by Je Rinpoche (Lama Tsongkhapa) in the last verse of the *Three Principles of the Path*:

In this way, you realise exactly  
The vital points of the three principal aspects of the path.  
Resort to seeking solitude, generate the power of effort,  
And quickly accomplish your final goal, my child.

It is only by going into isolation or solitary retreat that one can distance oneself from all the hustle and bustle of life. Only with such a lifestyle will there be the opportunity for the mind to settle down naturally. The afflictions—anger, attachment and ignorance—will weaken and subside. Through practice and by cultivating the mind, one will then have a chance of achieving one's final goal. We are talking here about the goal of definite goodness, i.e., liberation from samsara and the attainment of full enlightenment.

All these conditions will make a huge difference in enabling you to be able to develop experiences and realisations of the path. The place you live in makes a difference. Not only that. You must exert joyous effort with a real liking for what you have to do, supported by your strong remembrance of death and impermanence and that death can come quickly. When such conditions come together, I think that you will definitely achieve some experiences and realisations.

If we look at the kind of lifestyle that we lead as city dwellers, how is it possible to say that we possess the lineage of the superiors? It is not possible. Obviously then there is no enlightenment. Not working with attachment means that there can be no realisations. Therefore, we don't find people with realisations. The situation is such that all the teachers don't have realisations and all the students don't have realisations. That is the reality.

*Khen Rinpoche: We are all in samsara together.*

It should be like this: As Lama Tsongkhapa said, you have to study the teachings well and think about them with some conviction. Then you enter into an isolation retreat. You cultivate your mind and gain some experiences and realisations. Only then can you emerge and impart your knowledge to others. Only then are you talking from your own experience.

However, in this day and age, such practitioners are practically non-existent. They are very rare. Those who are teaching are teaching from mere knowledge, i.e., they are only imparting their intellectual knowledge of the teachings. That is the reality today.

*Sutra School*

The proponents of the Sutra School (SS) also have their own take on what the lineage is. For them, the lineage is the potential or the capacity that can produce an uncontaminated mind in the continuum of a sentient being.

*Mind Only School*

The proponents of the Mind Only School (MOS) posit something similar. For the MOS, the lineage is the seed in the continuum of a sentient being that produces the uncontaminated mind. But according to the MOS, there are three characteristics:

1. This uncontaminated mind has existed since time without beginning, transiting from one uncontaminated mind to another.
2. The potential has also existed from the very beginning, i.e., by nature, it has always been there.
3. This potential exists on the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness.

For the MOS that asserts the four bodies, the lineage is posited as the seed existing in the mind that has the potential to bring forth the arising of the uncontaminated mind. This lineage is divided into two:-

1. the naturally abiding lineage, which is posited as the lineage that exists at the time when it is not nourished or activated by hearing, reflection and meditation.
2. the developmental lineage, which is posited as the lineage that exists during the time when it is nourished or activated by hearing, reflection and meditation.

There is a reason why the MOS calls the seed that can produce the uncontaminated mind as the lineage. Because of that seed, then the uncontaminated wisdom can be generated. Through that, one achieves the wisdom of a buddha. As such, for the MOS, that seed is called the lineage.

*Middle Way School*

For the proponents of the Middle Way School (MWS), the lineage is the mind's emptiness of true existence. They talk about the mind being in the nature of clear light. This clear light nature of the mind or the mind's emptiness has never been polluted by the adventitious defilements but the mind is obscured by the adventitious defilements.

Since the nature of the emptiness of a buddha's mind is no different from the nature of the emptiness of a sentient being's mind, as such, the emptiness of true existence of a sentient being's mind is called the lineage. Both are the same in that the adventitious defilements have never abided or resided within the nature of those minds.

There is the naturally abiding lineage and the developmental lineage. The mind and the mind's emptiness of true existence are not the same thing. The mind that is clear and knowing has the capacity and nature to cognise (or be aware). It is an awareness. As such, can we call:

- the mind the developmental lineage and
- the mind's emptiness of true existence as the naturally abiding lineage?

The mind and the mind's emptiness of true existence are one entity. They are different but not separate.

From the very beginning of this root text, when we were looking at the fourth vajra topic—the basic constituent—we saw how we can look at it from the perspective of the conventional and from the perspective of the ultimate:

- What is posited as the conventional basic constituent is the mind itself.
- From the ultimate point of view, it is the mind's emptiness of true existence.

If it is the buddha lineage, it must necessarily go on to enlightenment. Having said that, if we take:

- the developmental lineage to be the mind itself and
- the naturally abiding lineage to be the mind's emptiness of true existence

are we saying that all minds go on to enlightenment? No. Obviously, not all minds go on to enlightenment. How can afflictions go on to enlightenment?

So when we say that the mind is the conventional buddha lineage or the developmental lineage, we are not talking about all minds. We are only referring to the mind in general. You must understand this.

Since a sentient being possesses a mind—we can take that to be the developmental lineage or the conventional buddha lineage—and the ultimate nature of that mind is its emptiness of true existence—we can take that to be the naturally abiding lineage—therefore, it follows that sentient beings necessarily possess the buddha lineage (or buddha nature).

Sentient beings' minds are currently obscured by adventitious defilements. Can the adventitious defilements be removed? Yes, they can be removed because they are adventitious.

The nature of the mind is clear light and is empty of true existence. The mind's emptiness of true existence—the naturally abiding lineage—is currently covered or accompanied by adventitious defilements. But because the mind is by nature empty of existing truly, therefore, these defilements that accompany this emptiness (or suchness) can be removed. So again it goes back to the tathagata essence, the mind's emptiness of true existence.

*Khen Rinpoche: Are you following this or is it too difficult?*

When you compare the MOS' assertion of lineage and the MWS' assertion of lineage, is there any difference between the two?

What the MOS asserts to be the lineage is the seed that produces the uncontaminated mind and this seed has three characteristics. Then the naturally abiding lineage is that lineage which exists when there is no enhancement, activation or nourishment by hearing, reflection and meditation.

But according to the MWS, that assertion does not fulfil the meaning of naturally abiding lineage. The MWS asserts that a seed that has the capacity to generate an



uncontaminated wisdom is the result of causes and conditions. As such, it is freshly or newly produced. As such, it does not abide naturally, i.e., it is not there by nature.

Then what do the MWS assert to be the naturally abiding lineage? It is the mind's emptiness of true existence. The mind's emptiness of true existence is the ultimate nature of the mind and has existed with the mind from when time existed, i.e., for beginningless lifetimes.

Emptiness is a permanent phenomenon. As such, it is not freshly or newly produced. According to the MWS, when you search for the truly existent mind, when you are trying to look for the imputed object, what you find at the end of the day is not the truly existent mind. What you find at the end of your correct analysis is the mind's emptiness. But that does not mean that the mind is non-existent. Obviously the mind exists.

The natural conclusion that arises from that analysis is that the mind is none other than that which is merely imputed by mind. The mind exists in mere name.

When the mind of a sentient being is completely free of the adventitious defilements, that mind acquires a new name, the wisdom truth body.

You have the mind of a sentient being. This mind is currently obscured by adventitious defilements. When those adventitious defilements are completely removed, then the mind is not accompanied by adventitious defilements any more. That mind is no longer called the mind of a sentient being. It acquires a new name, the wisdom truth body. The wisdom truth body's emptiness of true existence is the nature body.

During the time when he is not a buddha, as a sentient being, his mind's emptiness is called suchness with defilement, the tathagata essence. At the time of enlightenment, when the mind is free of all adventitious defilements, that wisdom truth body's emptiness of true existence is called the nature body.

This means that there exists in every sentient being's continuum the very capacity or potential to achieve the wisdom truth body and the nature body. Why is that so? Because if we are a sentient being, we naturally have a mind, which has the potential to transform into the wisdom truth body of a buddha. If we have a mind, whether we realise it or not, the mind by nature is empty of true existence. The mind's emptiness of true existence is that which will become the nature body when all the defilements have been eliminated. Since all sentient beings possess a mind and since the ultimate nature of that mind is the emptiness of true existence, from this, can we then agree from this that all sentient beings possess the tathagata essence? If we think along these lines, we can have some idea of how all sentient beings possess the lineage. This is basically how all sentient beings can become buddhas.

In the earlier discussion on the fourth topic—the basic constituent—which is the tathagata essence or the lineage, you can talk about it from the conventional point of view and the ultimate point of view; essentially one is a conventional truth and one is an ultimate truth.

Therefore, the MWS says that since all sentient beings possess the buddha lineage, there isn't a sentient being who will not become a buddha. So all sentient beings who are waiting to become buddhas will become buddhas.

~~~~~

*Question:* Are the terms buddha lineage, buddha nature, tathagata essence and basic constituent exactly the same? I am wondering whether there is only one term in Tibetan.

*Answer:* In Tibetan, the basic constituent is *kham*; the tathagata essence is *de zhin nyingpo*; and the buddha lineage is *rig*. We can think of these three—basic constituent (*kham*), the tathagata essence (*de zhin nyingpo*) and the lineage (*rig*)—as referring to the same thing but it depends on how we explain them. Generally, you could say that they are talking about the same thing.

But if you talk about the basic constituent or the tathagata essence, sometimes in Tibetan, the two terms go together, *kham de zhin nyingpo*. In English, this is 'the essence of the one thus gone'. But those words—whether you put them together or apart—primarily refer to the mind's emptiness of true existence.

The word, lineage, can refer to the naturally abiding lineage but primarily, it is referring to the developmental lineage, whereas the basic constituent and the tathagata essence primarily refer to the naturally abiding lineage.

But I don't think there is any issue if you were to take them all to mean the same thing. It is just a matter of how you phrase it or how you explain the term. If you explain 'lineage' to include the naturally abiding lineage besides the developmental lineage, it is driving at the same thing. If you were to say that they are all the same, there is no problem.

If someone were to ask you about the tathagata essence, then you can say, "The tathagata essence is divided into two. There is the naturally abiding lineage and there is the developmental lineage." Or if someone were to ask you about lineage, you can say, "There are two lineages: the naturally abiding lineage and the developmental lineage."

(In response to a student's qualm) We are not saying that the tathagata essence *is* the developmental lineage. We are not saying that. But when they are divided into two, then there are two lineages.

*Question:* In the *Heart Sutra*, when it says "How should any son of the lineage train who wishes to practise the activity of the profound perfection of the wisdom?" does that refer to the tathagata essence?

*Answer:* The son or the daughter of the lineage mentioned in the *Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* does not refer to all sentient beings. The lineage here refers to the one who possesses the Mahayana lineage and whose Mahayana lineage

has been awakened. Essentially we are referring to the bodhisattvas.

*Question:* Tonight I heard the mind being in the nature of clear light is emptiness and that emptiness is permanent since beginningless time. Previously I had asked if the clear light was permanent or impermanent. The answer was that it was impermanent. Tonight I hear something different being mentioned. I would like to clarify where I have gone wrong.

*Answer:* The statement is that the nature of the mind is clear light. The mind's nature is clear light. The mind's nature here is referring to its ultimate nature, i.e., its emptiness of true existence. So that is clear light because the adventitious defilements have never resided within the nature of that mind.

*Student:* Is that not permanent? I was asking about clear light mind being permanent or impermanent in Lesson 1.

*Answer:* The mind's factor of luminosity and knowing (or clear and knowing) is a composite phenomenon, i.e., an impermanent phenomenon.

*Student:* But I was asking about clear light.

*Khen Rinpoche:* OK. We will talk about this next time.

LINEAGE ACCORDING TO THE FOUR BUDDHIST TENETS	
<i>Great Exposition School</i>	Lineage is the virtuous mental factor of non-attachment, which is the substantial cause for the realisations in the continuum of a superior. This is that which moves to the Buddha ground.
<i>Sutra School</i>	Lineage is the potential for the generation of an uncontaminated mind in the continuum of a sentient being.
<i>Mind Only School</i>	Lineage is the seed in the continuum of a sentient being that produces the uncontaminated mind with three characteristics: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This uncontaminated mind has existed since time without beginning, transiting from one uncontaminated mind to another.</li> <li>2. The potential has existed from the beginning and by nature has always been there.</li> <li>3. This potential exists on the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness.</li> </ol> The lineage is divided into: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the naturally abiding lineage that exists at the time when it is not nourished or activated by hearing, reflection and meditation.</li> <li>2. the developmental lineage that exists during the time when it is nourished or activated by hearing, reflection and meditation</li> </ol>
<i>Middle Way School</i>	Lineage is the mind's emptiness of true existence. Since the nature of the emptiness of a buddha's mind is no different from the nature of the emptiness of a sentient being's mind, as such, the emptiness of true existence of a sentient being's mind is called the lineage. Both are the same in that the adventitious defilements have never abided or resided within the nature of those minds.

Interpreted by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme; transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Vivien Ng & Aki Yeo; edited by Cecilia Tsong.