

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 Gyaltzab Je’s Commentary to the First Chapter, translated by Gavin Kilty (*The Tathagata Essence, Commentary to the First Chapter* by Gyaltzab Darma Rinchen © FPMT, Inc. January 2007).

Lesson 19

23 April 2015

Verse from the Vajra Cutter Sutra: “A dream.” Review of the disintegratedness of karma. Chapter One: *The Essence of a One Gone Thus*. Verse 131: The nine forms of defilements. Covering only the first seven defilements from the dormant three poisons to the path of meditation abandonments.

In order to be liberated from the root of cyclic existence, the apprehension of a self must be eliminated. The apprehension of a self can only be eliminated with the wisdom realising selflessness. With respect to phenomena—the object of the past, the object of the present and the object of the future—one has to see that they do not exist inherently.

VERSE FROM THE VAJRA CUTTER SUTRA: “A dream”

A star, a visual aberration, a flame of a lamp,
An illusion, a drop of dew, or a bubble,
A dream, a flash of lightning, a cloud –
See conditioned things as such!

“A dream” is analogous of things that have happened in the past. When we remember the objects of the past, they appear to exist inherently. We assent to that appearance and apprehend them to exist inherently. That brings about a range of emotions such as disgust or attachment.

When we wake up from a dream, the dream appearances have already ceased to exist. But later on, when we remember what happened in the dream, sometimes we react with different kinds of emotions. Likewise, although things of the past have never existed inherently—that is not their nature—when we apprehend them, we believe that they exist inherently and that induces a variety of emotions. The dream

here is an analogy to help us reflect on how objects of the past do not exist inherently.

Is the dream consciousness an erroneous mind? It is a wrong consciousness but if it is a wrong consciousness, how is it that we are able to remember what has happened in the dream when we are awake? You cannot remember something that you had not realised earlier. Is it not the case that when you realise something, later on, there is a possibility of remembering what you realised?

Khen Rinpoche: This is the question. It is just a thought. You think about it.

The meaning of recollection is remembering something that had been ascertained earlier. Isn't a remembering consciousness or memory then a subsequent cogniser?

Khen Rinpoche: This topic (i.e., lorig) has already been completed.

Is a dream consciousness a consciousness that realises its object?

(Student's response is inaudible).

Does the apprehension of true existence realise its object?

How is the second question related to the first question? When you give an answer, another question is raised. Do you see now the benefit of this exercise?

Question 1: Does a dream consciousness realise objects?

Student: Yes, it has to realise the object that it sees in the dream. Otherwise, how would you have any experience at all?

Khen Rinpoche: So your answer is yes?

Student: Yes.

Question 2: Does the apprehension of true existence realise its object, yes or no?

Khen Rinpoche: The answer is either yes or no. Whatever your answer is, you have to explain the reason. I am saying, "realise its object." If your answer is that it doesn't realise its object and I ask you why, then you have to explain your answer.

Student: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: Is the apprehension of true existence a valid cogniser?

Student: It is valid but mistaken.

Khen Rinpoche: I think this will take whole night.

Student: Then the answer is no.

Khen Rinpoche: What is the problem if it is a valid cogniser?

Student: It is valid with respect to its apprehended object but not valid with respect to ...

Khen Rinpoche: What does the apprehension of true existence realise? What does ignorance realise?

Student: Ignorance realises the inherently existent object itself.

Khen Rinpoche: How can you realise a non-existent?

Khen Rinpoche: *I think this is getting worse and worse you know.*

This shows how important it is to think and to ask questions. If you are content and simply accept whatever others say and leave it at that, then there is no way to learn and improve. Going back to the question: Does the dream consciousness realise objects? In our experience, we remember things that we dream of. How does that happen?

REVIEW OF DISINTEGRATEDNESS OF KARMA

Maybe we will talk a little about the disintegratedness we discussed on Tuesday. This is connected to the analogy of a dream.

When karma ceases, it produces an effect sometime in the future, i.e., an effect arises from this past karma. According to the Consequence Middle Way School (CMWS), the pastness of karma or the disintegratedness of karma is a composite phenomenon. As such, it produces an effect.

The CMWS explained that when karma ceases one day—the disintegratedness of karma—the continuum of that karma will produce an effect when conditions ripen.

With the exception of the CMWS, every other Buddhist tenet asserts that all phenomena exist by way of their own character, from their own side and are inherently existent. With the exception of the CMWS, every proponent of Buddhist tenets has to account for how a result can occur after the karma has been accumulated and ceases. For them, the disintegratedness of karma is a non-composite phenomenon. As such, they must account for how karma can still give rise to a result.

If the disintegratedness of karma is permanent and non-composite, it cannot give rise to an effect. At the same time, they assert that all phenomena exist by way of their own character and exist from their own side. That means there must be something that one can point to as karma and the result of karma. Since they have to account for the effects of karma that is why they came up with the factor of non-wastage. Some proponents of the Mind Only School (MOS) came up with the concept of a mind-basis-of-all being the basis of infusion of such karmic imprints while others assert that the mental consciousness is the repository of karmic imprints. Basically, they

had to come up with the concept of karmic imprints as something that one can point to, this being a necessary tenet of those schools.

According to the CMWS, however there is no need to come up with explanations such as the factor of non-wastage, the mind-basis-of-all and so forth. This is because according to the CMWS, all phenomena that exist necessarily exist in a non-inherent way. So phenomena are not inherently existent and they do not exist from their own side.

As such, karma does not exist from its own side and does not exist inherently. The production of karma, the arising of a new karma and the accumulation of karma do not exist from their own side. Likewise, the disintegration of karma does not exist from its own side. It does not exist inherently by way of its own nature. As such, the cessation or disintegratedness of karma is not an inherently existent phenomenon. There is no inherently existent disintegration and there is no inherently existent disintegratedness.

This is not to say that the CMWS does not assert imprints. You should not get the wrong idea that there is no such thing as imprints. That is not the point. The point I'm trying to make here is that the pastness of karma, the disintegratedness of karma, is a composite phenomenon. Because it is a composite phenomenon, it will give rise to its effect. So in the next moment of the disintegratedness of karma, another moment of disintegratedness is produced. This is because the disintegratedness of karma is a composite phenomenon. If it is a composite phenomenon, a functioning thing, it necessarily produces an effect. This is the explanation.

What if somebody were to ask you this question:

You say that karma's disintegratedness produces disintegratedness, i.e., that one moment of disintegratedness produces another moment of disintegratedness. So there is this continuum of disintegratedness.

The disintegratedness of a non-virtuous karma produces the next moment of disintegratedness of the non-virtuous karma and so forth. If there are so many moments of disintegratedness, does that mean there are also so many non-virtuous karma?

If the disintegratedness of karma produces disintegratedness, and that disintegratedness produces another moment of disintegratedness, won't that be endless? It follows then that there is no end to the ripening effects. They will be infinite.

Then there is no buddha lineage and this means there is no way to achieve enlightenment.

Do you see the point behind this question? Is there some benefit or not?

Khen Rinpoche: Either you are totally confused and see no point in thinking about this or do you have some interest in what I'm asking here?

How would you answer this question?

~~~~~

Verse 131

The nine forms of defilements—(1-3) [the latencies or seeds of] desire, hatred, and obscuration [which are overcome by the exalted wisdom of a Superior], (4) the strong arousal [or manifestation] of those [three poisons],

(5) The level of] the predispositions [of ignorance which are the means of achieving the uncontaminated actions and the mental body in the continuum of a Foe Destroyer and which are to be overcome by the exalted wisdom of the great enlightenment], (6) the objects to be abandoned by the path of seeing [which obstruct a common being from seeing reality], (7) the objects to be abandoned by the path of meditation [in the continuum of a Learner Superior], (8) The objects to be abandoned by the [seven] impure [grounds which are to be overcome by the pure grounds],

And (9) the defilements dependent on the pure grounds [which are to be overcome by the vajra-like meditative stabilization],

Among the nine forms of defilements, the first three are dormant desire, dormant anger and dormant ignorance (or bewilderment) and the fourth is the strong arousal of these three poisons.

*The first three defilements: dormant desire, dormant hatred, dormant ignorance (or bewilderment)*

The first three refer to those afflictions that produce rebirth in the form and formless realms. This requires an explanation of the concentrations and the form and formless realms.

First, one needs to have achieved calm abiding. On the basis of that, through the different accesses or preparations, one achieves an actual concentration. This is followed by the meditations on the aspects of coarseness and peacefulness whereby one looks at the attributes of a lower realm and considers them to be coarse. Then one looks at the attributes of a higher realm, finding them peaceful and appealing. One then desire that. This is the meditation on the aspects of coarseness and peacefulness.

When one achieves the first concentration, at that time, the manifest afflictions of the desire realm have ceased or stopped. But that does not mean that the seeds of these affliction have been removed. They are still there and as such, they are called dormant.

You may recall from the stages of the path literature that there are three kinds of karma:

1. Non-meritorious karma
2. meritorious karma

### 3. immoveable karma

It is the immoveable karma that causes one to be born in the form and formless realms and it is the dormant three poisons that cause one to accumulate that karma.

Starting with achieving the first concentration, this is followed by the second, third and fourth concentrations. These are the lands or places of the form realm. The beings in this realm do accumulate karma but they accumulate only immoveable karma. Non-meritorious karma and meritorious karma are not accumulated on the basis of an existence in either the form realm or formless realm.

But things are not so straightforward. This is what is taught but you may wonder. Let's say you are a form realm god or a formless realm god. The question is this: "Why can't I create meritorious karma? Why do I only accumulate immoveable karma"?

Non-meritorious karma is the karma to be reborn in the three lower realms. Meritorious karma is the karma that will cause one to be born as a human or a desire realm god. But the gods in the form and formless realms do not accumulate the karma to be born in the lower realms while they are there nor do they accumulate the karma that will cause them to be reborn as a human or a desire realm god.

The karma that the gods in the form and formless realms accumulate is immoveable karma. It is called immoveable karma because the effect of that immoveable karma can only be experienced in the form and formless realms. It will not ripen on the basis of a desire realm body. As such, it is called immoveable. The effects of the projecting karma accumulated on the basis of a form or formless realm existence can only be experienced in the form and formless realms. This is the meaning behind the words 'immoveable karma'.

The karma to be born in the desire realm must be motivated by a desire realm affliction, i.e., an affliction that belongs to the desire realm. As such, because the gods in the form and formless realms do not have manifest desire realm afflictions, they do not accumulate the karma to be born in the desire realm.

We are not saying that the gods in the form and formless realms are guaranteed to move towards enlightenment. Nor are we saying that the gods in the form and formless realms can never be reborn again in the desire realm. We are not saying that because the gods in the form and formless realms often go to the hell realms.

With regard to the realms of cyclic existence, they are often referred to range from the Avici hells up to the peak of cyclic existence, the highest formless realm. That is samsara. Samsara means circling. So it is obvious that cyclic existence is the three realms: the desire realms, the form realms and the formless realms. As such, the gods in the form and formless realms definitely can be reborn in the desire realms. But the point we are making here now is that the gods in the form or formless realms do not accumulate the karma to be reborn in the desire realms.

But there are gods in the form and formless realm who are reborn in the hell realms. What is the cause for that? That is due to their past karma, i.e., the karma they have

accumulated to be reborn in the hells in the past.

The purpose of this explanation is because the first three of the nine defilements listed in Verse 131 are the three mental poisons in the form of latencies or seeds. We call them dormant—dormant attachment, dormant anger, dormant ignorance (or bewilderment). These are the dormant three poisons that motivate the accumulation of the projecting karma for the higher realms, i.e., the form and formless realms.

While this is the case, it is still possible to have manifest afflictions in the higher realms. Although the first three defilements are listed as the dormant three mental poisons, they also include their manifest forms, because there are manifest desire and manifest bewilderment in the higher realms.

*The fourth defilement: “the strong arousal [or manifestation] of those [three poisons]”*

The fourth defilement refers to the afflictions that motivate the accumulation of meritorious and non-meritorious karma such as:

- the strong attachment or desire that leads to the accumulation of meritorious karma that causes a good rebirth in the desire realms.
- the strong anger that leads to the accumulation of the non-meritorious karma that causes one to be reborn in the lower realms

I think perhaps this is the reason for classifying the defilements in such a way, i.e., separating the dormant afflictions from the afflictions of the desire realms. This is in order to relate the afflictions to the three realms.

Another point that is being made here is this: Of the two—the dormant afflictions and the manifest afflictions—the manifest afflictions have to be stopped first before one can overcome the dormant afflictions.

The peak of cyclic existence is the highest realm in the formless realms. The level below that is called nothingness. To abandon the afflictions up to that level of nothingness, one can depend on the worldly path that meditates on the aspects of coarseness and peacefulness. But by depending on such a path, one can only go as far as the level of nothingness.

The worldly path cannot overcome the afflictions of the highest realm in samsara, the peak of cyclic existence. In order to overcome the afflictions of the peak of cyclic existence, in particular to abandon the seeds of those afflictions, one has to depend on a transcendental path or non-worldly path. By depending on a transcendental or non-worldly path, one abandons the afflictions together with their seeds. Then one becomes a foe destroyer or arhat.

*The fifth defilement: the level of the predispositions of ignorance*

Does that mean the arhat’s job is done in that he has nothing left to abandon? The answer is no. In order to understand that there is still something left to be abandoned, we have the fifth defilement, the level of the predispositions of ignorance.

What if we were to say that the level of the predispositions of ignorance is simply the

imprints placed by the apprehension of true existence? If that is the case, what do these imprints do? What do they produce? They produce the appearance of true existence. Based on this appearance of true existence, subtle effort arises and that motivates the accumulation of uncontaminated karma. That results in the mental body, i.e., a body having a mental nature. We have discussed this before:

- From the imprints of the apprehension of true existence comes the appearance of true existence.
- Then subtle effort arises.
- This leads to the accumulation of uncontaminated karma.
- The accumulation of uncontaminated karma results in the mental body

Let's think about this. There is this mental body. What is its substantial cause? What are its cooperative condition? If you think about it, these are difficult questions. What if we were to say that:

- the level of the predispositions of ignorance is the cooperative condition for the mental body?
- the uncontaminated karma is the substantial cause of the mental body?

Is uncontaminated karma consciousness? Karma is intention and intention is consciousness. It follows then that uncontaminated karma is consciousness.

I often wonder whether these issues I bring up in class make any sense to you at all. Otherwise, there is no point continuing with this approach. Are you following the discussion? Are you interested?

To reiterate, what is the substantial cause or main producer of a mental body? As I said earlier, if we take the level of predispositions of ignorance to be the imprints that are planted by the apprehension of true existence, then what do these imprints do?:

- These imprints produce the appearance of true existence.
- Because there is the appearance of true existence, this leads to the accumulation of uncontaminated karma.
- If uncontaminated karma is accumulated, there must be an effect.
- What is its effect? It is said to be this mental body.

It is said in the teachings that when the bodhisattvas are abiding on the pure grounds and working for sentient beings, it still requires effort on their part, i.e., they are not able to do such work effortlessly. But their kind of effort is unlike the effort we exert. Our effort or exertion is extremely coarse while their effort is subtle effort. Only the buddhas can work for sentient beings spontaneously, without effort. Non-buddhas cannot do so. This includes the bodhisattvas on the pure grounds because they still have the level of predispositions of ignorance and uncontaminated karma.

These beings who have such mental bodies are said to undergo birth and death. But again their birth and death are unlike what we experience which is very coarse and gross. Their birth and death is more refined and subtler and we call it the inconceivable transference of death.

We do possess something that is like an equivalent of a mental body. This happens when we are in the intermediate state. The body of an intermediate state being is like



a light energy body and is not a coarse body made up of blood and bones. It is said that the intermediate state beings can pass through walls as their bodies do not have the characteristic of obstructiveness. They can go to and arrive at any place through the power of mere thought, i.e., they only need to think of a place and they will be there right away.

Perhaps we can compare the inconceivable transference of death that people with mental bodies undergo to what happens to us in the intermediate state. The lifespan of an intermediate state being is said to be a maximum of 49 days. Every seven days, if that being is still in the intermediate state, then that intermediate state being dies and is reborn again.

*The path of seeing abandonments and the path of meditation abandonments*

In the context of the nine defilements, after the level of the predispositions of ignorance comes the path of seeing abandonments and the path of meditation abandonments.

*~ Afflictive obscurations and knowledge obscurations*

In general, if it is an obscuration, it has to be included either among the path of seeing abandonments or the path of meditation abandonments. In order to understand this, we need to have some idea of what the obscurations are. By now, we would have heard this many times:

- The obscurations are the afflictive obscurations and the knowledge obscurations.
- The afflictive obscurations refer to the phenomena that principally interfere with the attainment of liberation.
- The knowledge obscurations principally interfere with the attainment of omniscience. These are called knowledge obscurations because they obscure one from seeing the diversities of phenomena.

Put another way, a knowledge obscuration is the obscuration that causes one to arise from the meditative equipoise focussing on emptiness. Until one has achieved enlightenment, one still has to go in and out of meditation as one cannot see both aspects of phenomena at the same time. It is only when one is a buddha that one does not have to arise again from meditative equipoise as a buddha abides forever within emptiness. Only a buddha can abide in meditative equipoise focussing on emptiness without having to arise from that state ever again. This is the unique defining characteristic of a buddha. Nobody else can do that.

This question then arises: What is the fault or fallacy if a buddha were to decide to arise from his meditative equipoise on emptiness?

The word 'afflictive' in afflictive obscurations tells us that these obscurations have their root in the afflictions. The afflictive obscurations cause one to remain unpacified, i.e., they cause one to continue to experience the suffering of cyclic existence. The nature of an affliction is such that it causes the mind to be very disturbed, to be an unpacified state of mind. There is no peace, whereas nirvana is peace so the afflictive obscurations are the phenomena that obstruct the achievement of peace or nirvana.

- What constitutes the afflictive obscurations? According to the CMWS, the

afflictive obscurations are made up primarily of the apprehension of a self together with its seed and the afflictions such as hatred, anger and desire that are induced by that conception of a self.

- What about the knowledge obscurations? The knowledge obscurations are made up of the imprints that are deposited by the apprehension of true existence and the mistaken dualistic appearance produced by those imprints.

So these are the assertions of the CMWS as to what the afflictive obscurations and the knowledge obscurations are.

~ *The obscurations in terms of the path of seeing abandonments and the path of meditation abandonments*

You can also look at the obscurations in terms of the path of seeing abandonments and the path of meditation abandonments:

- afflictive obscurations that are path of seeing abandonments
  - The path of seeing abandonments are the intellectually acquired apprehension of true existence together with its seeds and the afflictions, such as attachment, that are induced by that conception or those seeds.
  - The intellectually acquired apprehension of true existence is abandoned when the path of release of the path of seeing is attained.
  - The intellectually acquired apprehension of true existence arises due to the adoption of certain views, asserting a particular philosophy and so forth. It is not innate and it is not natural.
- afflictive obscurations that are path of meditation abandonments
  - These afflictive obscurations primarily refer to the innate apprehension of true existence. This apprehension has existed within us since beginningless time. It is part of our nature, our tendency to naturally think, “I am real.”
  - They are the innate apprehension of true existence together with its seeds and the afflictions that are induced by that conception or those seeds.
  - The afflictive obscurations that are the path of meditation abandonments cannot be abandoned by the path of seeing. They can only be abandoned by the path of meditation.

The knowledge obscurations are not divided into intellectually acquired and innate. According to the CMWS, there are no knowledge obscurations that are path of seeing abandonments. They are only path of meditation abandonments.

| <b>THE DEFILEMENTS IN VERSE 131 (SEVEN OF THE NINE DEFILEMENTS)</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Dormant desire<br>2. Dormant anger<br>3. Dormant bewilderment    | These afflictions produce rebirth in the form and formless realms.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 4. Strong arousal of those three poisons                            | These afflictions motivate the accumulation of meritorious and non-meritorious karma:<br>• strong anger leads to the accumulation of the non-meritorious karma that causes one to be reborn in the lower realms.<br>• strong attachment or desire motivates the accumulation of meritorious karma that causes a good rebirth in the desire realms. |

| <b>THE DEFILEMENTS IN VERSE 131 (SEVEN OF THE NINE DEFILEMENTS)</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 5. The level of the predispositions of ignorance                    | These are the imprints that are planted by the apprehension of true existence and are the cooperative condition for the arising of the mental body.                                                                                  |
| 6. Path of seeing abandonments                                      | The intellectually acquired apprehension of true existence together with its seeds and the afflictions such as the attachment that are induced by that conception or those seeds.                                                    |
| 7. Path of meditation abandonments                                  | The afflictive obscurations that are the innate apprehension of true existence together with its seeds and the afflictions that are induced by that conception or those seeds.<br>The knowledge obscurations are also included here. |

~~~~~

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SUNDAY, 26 APRIL 2015

1. Discuss the meaning of Verse 27.
2. Verse 25 lists the four points that are difficult to comprehend. What are they?
3. With reference to Verse 32, what are the four obscurations and what are their antidotes?
4. Explain the connection between the four antidotes and the four results, which are the perfection of the qualities of purity, self, bliss and permanence listed in Verse 34. (Verses 36 & 37 are also related to this question).

Optional questions:

5. Discuss the nine examples (listed in Verses 97 & 98) and the meanings that they exemplify.
6. There are twelve links of dependent origination related to the class of thoroughly afflicted phenomena but there are also twelve links of dependent origination that are related to the class of thoroughly pure phenomena. If so, what do you think they are?

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