

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 20

26 May 2015

Reviewing the verse from the *Vajra Cutter Sutra*. Revisiting the disintegratedness of karma. The basis of infusion of imprints. Why the mere 'I' is posited to be the enduring basis of infusion. Chapter One: *The Essence of a One Gone Thus*. Verse 131: The nine forms of defilements.

REVIEWING THE VERSE FROM THE VAJRA CUTTER SUTRA

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!

I have given some explanations of this verse but it is important that you think about its meaning.

"A star"

"A star" is analogous of how within every phenomenon there are two levels of reality, i.e., the two truths:

- there is an object, an ultimate truth, the ultimate nature of reality
- there is an object that appears to a conventional awareness

As I mentioned before, a variety of appearances appears to the conventional valid cogniser (or conventional awareness). Some of these appearances are existents whereas others are not, i.e., whatever appears to a conventional awareness is not necessarily an existent.

Furthermore, whatever appears to a conventional awareness does not necessarily

exist in the way it appears to this mind. All appearances to the conventional valid cogniser distinguishing a conventionality appear as truly existent. This is necessarily so on the sentient beings' ground. But does that mean that phenomena are truly existent and exist in the way they appear? No.

“A visual aberration”

So “a visual aberration” mentioned in the verse from the *Vajra Cutter Sutra* is analogous of this fact. A person who does not have any defects in his eyes will not experience the vision of falling hairs. If falling hairs do exist, they must be seen by someone who has non-defective eyes. Likewise, although phenomenon appears to be truly existent, they do not exist truly. For if phenomena are real in the sense of existing truly that must be realised by the wisdom of the meditative equipoise of a superior but that is not the case.

Although phenomena do not exist truly, we cannot posit the non-existence of phenomena because phenomena function and we experience their benefit and harm. Although phenomena do not exist truly, they exist as mere appearances. This is asserted by the Consequence Middle Way School (CMWS).

“A flame of a lamp”

Phenomena exist. They are also dependently arisen. In order to help us to understand this fact, there is the analogy of “a flame of a lamp.” The flame of a butter lamp comes into being through the aggregation of many causes and conditions. It exists as a dependently arisen phenomenon.

What these three analogies—“the star, a visual aberration, a flame of a lamp”—seek to explain is the actual situation, i.e., how things exist. The reality is that there are two facets of truth. Although things do not exist from their own side, nevertheless they do exist and function. They exist as mere appearances.

“An illusion”

But whenever we turn our attention to the whole gamut of phenomena, we experience both suffering and pleasure, depending on how we view them. Although things do not exist from their own side, in and of themselves, we apprehend them to exist in that way. This induces anger and aversion for objects that cause us problems and suffering and attachment for objects that give us some experience of pleasure.

This is akin to how an audience reacts to the illusion that is created by an illusionist. An illusionist conjures up an image and the audience believes that what they are seeing is real. They react accordingly. Sometimes they get excited. Sometimes they experience fear. The illusionist does not see the illusion that he has conjured up to be real because he understands that it is an illusion. As such, he does not react in the way that the audience does. He is neither attached to nor fearful of the illusion that he has created.

Likewise, when we realise that things do not exist in and of themselves, that they do not exist from their own side, this reduces our fear and the whole range of emotions that come from believing that things are real. In short, all the fears that we experience in cyclic existence are the results of the mistaken mind. In particular, they

originate from our apprehension of true existence. That being the case, how do we rid ourselves of this source of all our fears? That answer comes in the rest of the verse from the *Vajra Cutter Sutra*, “a drop of dew, or a bubble, / A dream, a flash of lightning, a cloud.”

“A drop of dew”

“A drop of dew” shows the impermanence of phenomena. They can cease to exist very quickly so they do not remain for a very long time. Likewise, all composite phenomena that arise from causes and conditions necessarily undergo momentary change. They do not abide for even a moment. Instead, they are unstable, disintegrating from moment to moment. Even we, ourselves, are like that—changing from moment to moment. Other people are also like that. By understanding how composite phenomena are momentary, we can reduce our attachment and grasping to them.

“A bubble”

All composite phenomena are impermanent. All contaminated phenomena—everything that is included in cyclic existence—are suffering or in the nature of misery. This is shown by “a bubble.”

There is the suffering of suffering and the suffering of pain. We also have the suffering of change that refers to the contaminated feelings of pleasure that we all experience but we do not think that our feelings of pleasure are suffering. Although they are in the nature of suffering, we think of those pleasurable feelings as real pleasure. However, they are actually in the nature of suffering.

With regard to the analogy, the bubble is essentially made of water. It arises as a water bubble and when the water bubble bursts, it becomes water again. So regardless of how it manifests, its entity or nature is water.

Likewise, all the feelings that we experience in cyclic existence—pleasurable feelings, neutral feelings and so forth—although they seem different, essentially they have the same nature. They are all in the nature of suffering. By reflecting on impermanence and how everything in samsara is in the nature of suffering, we can deal with our suffering and reduce it. We will be able to deal with our afflictions like attachment, craving and so forth.

But reflecting on these points alone will not enable us to liberate ourselves from cyclic existence. In order to do that, we must eradicate the very root of cyclic existence, that is, the apprehension of a self. As such, there is a need to generate the wisdom realising selflessness.

“A dream”

As mentioned in the teachings, with regard to all phenomena—be it a phenomenon of the past, a phenomenon of the present or a phenomenon of the future—we should bring to mind how they are all empty of existing inherently.

The analogy of “a dream” helps us to understand how a phenomenon of the past is empty of existing inherently. In a dream, we may see many different things. When we

wake up from the dream, if we still remember the dream, some emotional reactions may still arise in us. Sometimes we may be very excited and attached to what we saw in the dream. Sometimes we become very fearful and develop aversion to what we saw in the dream. When we are awake, whatever we saw in the dream no longer exists. Nevertheless, the memory of them can still trigger a reaction in us.

Likewise, although events that happened in the past do not exist inherently, they can cause an effect in the future. An example of this is karma. A karma that was created or accumulated in the past can produce an effect in the future.

Revisiting the disintegratedness of karma

We had discussed briefly the disintegratedness of karma. It is not that the CMWS does not have an explanation of how when an action is accumulated and done, an imprint is left on the continuum and that imprint can give rise to an effect in the future. It is not that they do not have such an explanation and it is not that they are against this explanation.

But when the CMWS explains how karma can give rise to its effect in the future, they do not need to resort to that explanation of karmic imprints being left on the mind. Rather, their explanation focuses on the disintegratedness of karma.

Once a karma is accumulated and the action ceases, that cessation of karma—in other words, its moment of disintegratedness—is a produced or composite phenomenon. As such, that moment of disintegratedness gives rise to the next moment of disintegratedness and so forth. This is how the CMWS explains the link between the cessation of karma and the experiencing of the effects of that karma in the future.

In his works such as the *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness* and so forth, Nagarjuna employs many reasons seeking to explain how disintegratedness is a product and a functioning thing.

Another example: a person is dying and a person who is dead. Death happens after dying. In the twelve links of dependent origination, the last link is the link of aging and death. One has to age before one dies. Because of certain causes and conditions, one dies. That death, the ‘deadness’ of the person, is a product because it was caused by something and as such, it is a product, a functioning thing and a composite phenomenon. In the same way, it produces its next moment of disintegratedness and so forth.

The assertion that disintegratedness is a functioning thing is an uncommon assertion of the CMWS. The other tenets, from the Autonomy Middle Way School (AMWS) and those below it, are unable to and do not posit a past phenomenon to be a functioning thing. In particular, they do not posit disintegratedness to be a functioning thing.

The CMWS does assert imprints or predispositions. It is not that it does not assert imprints. In the works of the glorious Chandrakirti such as his *Commentary on the “Supplement to (Nagarjuna’s) ‘Treatise on the Middle’”*, there are many passages that explicitly show that the CMWS does assert imprints. The word ‘imprints’ often comes

up in his works where it is stated that imprints are placed on the mental continuum. The knowledge obscurations are also explained in relation to the mental continuum.

The basis of infusion for imprints

There is also much discussion with regard to the basis of infusion for imprints. There is the discussion on the meaning of the continuum of the mind. The Mind Only School (MOS) asserts a consciousness that is called the mind-basis-of-all that is the basis of infusion of imprints.

What is the basis of infusion of imprints according to the CMWS? There is much discussion on this. In Lama Tsongkhapa's *Illumination of Thought*, his commentary on Chandrakirti's *Commentary on the "Supplement to (Nagarjuna's) 'Treatise on the Middle,'"* the basis of infusion of imprints is posited to be the mere 'I' that is designated in dependence on the mental continuum.

It is very difficult to understand how the mere 'I' can act as the basis of infusion of imprints. In the first place, it is difficult for us to even grasp or have a feel for the mere 'I' that is merely imputed by thought. Indeed, this is very profound but the key point is that every phenomenon that exists is in the nature of emptiness. All phenomena—including the 'I' that is the basis of infusion of the imprints—do not exist inherently.

According to the CMWS, there are two different bases of infusion:

1. The temporary basis of infusion is the mental consciousness.
2. The enduring basis of infusion is the mere 'I'.

Form cannot act as the basis of infusion for imprints.

With regard to the consciousness, the sense consciousness is not posited as the basis of infusion of imprints as it is not stable in the sense that it is not enduring. As such, it is difficult to posit a sense consciousness to be the basis of infusion of imprints. The mental consciousness is posited as the temporary basis of infusion because it is more stable and enduring compared to a sense consciousness.

Sense consciousnesses are not enduring and stable because they do not manifest all the time. When one goes to sleep, they cease and become dormant whereas the mental consciousness is always there.

~ *Why the mere 'I' is posited to be the enduring basis of infusion*

This is something for you to think about here.

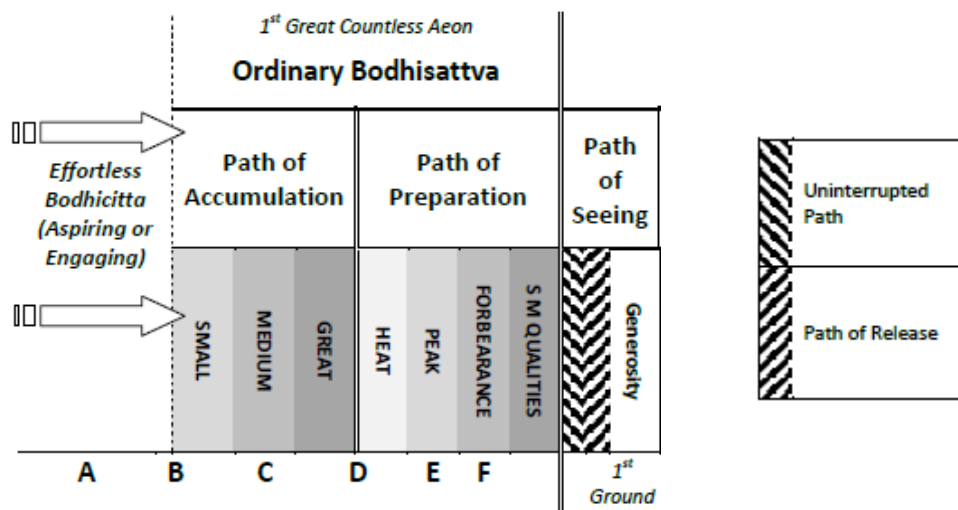
The sense consciousness cannot be the basis of infusion of imprints. The CMWS posits the mental consciousness to be the temporary basis of infusion of imprints. The mental consciousness of an individual progresses as he enters the path that starts with the path of accumulation followed by the path of preparation. When he enters the path of seeing, it is said that his mental consciousness will transform in entity into an uncontaminated wisdom or path.

Among the nine types of defilements, there are the path of seeing abandonments and

the path of meditation abandonments. When an individual enters the path of seeing in meditative equipoise, he first achieves the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing.

During the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing, during that wisdom, the path of seeing abandonments that are the afflictions and the path of seeing abandonments that are the seeds of those afflictions do not exist. But at this time, the path of seeing abandonments have not been abandoned yet. It is just that they are not appearing due to the force of the path, the antidote.

After the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing comes the path of release of the path of seeing. That is when the path of seeing abandonments are abandoned and true cessation is achieved.



- One achieves true path on the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing.
- One achieves true cessation on the path of release of the path of seeing.

There is indeed an order. True cessation comes after true path, i.e. true cessation is the result of true path.

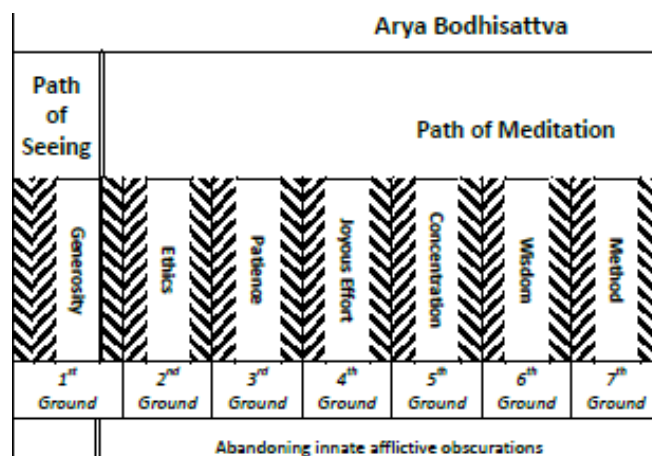
When we talk about true cessation, it is not a fully qualified result in that it comes about due to true path acting as the fully qualified cause and condition. Nevertheless, true cessation can only be achieved in dependence upon true path. The point is that these two are *not* achieved simultaneously.

Then a qualm arises: Does the person on the path of seeing possess the path of meditation abandonments, in particular, the seeds of the afflictions that are the path of meditation abandonments? One would have to say yes.

But if one were to say yes, where then do they exist? Where is the repository of those seeds?

One cannot posit the mental consciousness of the person on the path of seeing to be the repository of the seeds of the afflictions that are the path of meditation abandonments. Why? This is because his consciousness has already been

transformed into the entity of an uncontaminated path. One cannot posit that wisdom, an uncontaminated path, to be the repository of the path of meditation abandonments.



As such, the CMWS asserts that the repository of those seeds is the mere 'I' that is designated in dependence upon the mental continuum.

Khen Rinpoche: Are you getting something out of this or not?

Even if you don't understand everything, do you see what I am driving at? Are you getting the essence?

I have said a fair bit. Can somebody summarise the essence of what I have said?

Student: The CMWS posits that the predispositions are deposited on the mere 'I' because when the bodhisattva achieves the path of seeing, his mind is transformed into a mind of wisdom and that cannot be the repository for the afflictions that are the path of meditation abandonments. But the afflictions that are the path of meditation abandonments have to be deposited somewhere. The CMWS posits that they are deposited on the mere 'I'.

Khen Rinpoche: Great! You got it! I hope the others got that. You must get the point.

Question: Does this also apply to the arhats who have achieved the direct realisation of emptiness? For the arhats, are the knowledge obscurations also deposited on the mere 'I'?

Khen Rinpoche: Of course. There is no other option. That is the only way.

In order to be an enduring basis of infusion, it has to be something that exists all the time. As such, the enduring basis of infusion of imprints is the mere 'I'.

"A flash of lightning"

Back to the verse from the *Vajra Cutter Sutra*, "a dream, a flash of lightning, a cloud." Just as "a dream" is analogous of how past phenomena do not exist inherently, "a

flash of lightning” is used to explain how present phenomena do not exist inherently.

If you think of a flash of lightning, you can't really point to it and say, "It is arising." Nor when it arises, "There it is." Or when it is ceasing to exist, "It is disappearing." A flash of lightning comes and goes quickly. As such, you can't pinpoint the beginning, the middle or the end of a flash of lightning.

Likewise, when we talk about a present phenomenon and examine it, it is difficult to point to what exactly this object is. If we were to examine its cause, its entity and the effect that it will produce, there is nothing we can really point to that is the object. When we look for the object that our ignorance is clinging on to, believing that there is an inherently existent object that we can point to, we cannot really point to what exactly the object is. As such, the teachings say that all phenomena are mere appearances. They do not exist inherently. They do exist but they exist as nothing more than mere appearances. Phenomena have nothing beyond that. They are mere appearance like a flash of lightning.

"A cloud"

The analogy of "a cloud" helps us to reflect on how future phenomena do not exist inherently. Clouds appear in the vacuity of an empty sky. The sky itself does not have the ability and capacity to produce rain, hail or snow, yet in that sky clouds can form. When clouds form under certain conditions, they can give rise to heavy rainfall, hail or snow. That rain can nurture crops that will give rise to a harvest.

In the statement, "The mind is in the nature of clear light," the sky is likened here to the tathagata essence, the clear light nature of the mind. Due to the coming together of the afflictions, karma and their seeds—these factors that exist on the clear light nature of the mind—a variety of experiences, their effects, arise. We experience these effects be it suffering or pleasure that arise. These effects arise from the coming together of the factors of karma and afflictions and so forth.

The effects themselves do not exist from their own side. They do not exist in and of themselves. Likewise, the causes that give rise to these effects of karma and afflictions and so forth do not exist in and of themselves. They are not real and do not exist from their own side. They do not come together in an inherently existent way and then produce an inherently existent effect and result.

The analogies of "a dream, a flash of lightning, a cloud" help us understand how phenomena of the past, present and future are empty of existing inherently. In general, they help us understand that phenomena are empty of existing inherently. By realising this, we will be able to eradicate once and for all the root cause of all our problems.

It will be beneficial if we put aside some time to reflect on the meaning of this verse. When we recite this verse, we can also think about the meaning of the verse, starting with "a star," followed by "a visual aberration" and so forth. The entire practice is encapsulated in that verse.

The four seals state that:

1. All composite phenomena are impermanent.
2. All contaminated phenomena are suffering.
3. All phenomena are empty and selfless.
4. Nirvana is peace.

As stated in the third seal, “All phenomena are empty and selfless.” By realising how all phenomena are empty of existing inherently, one achieves peace, the liberation that is the pacification of the afflictions. When one achieves liberation, that is freedom from the afflictions.

It is the same with the four noble truths—how true sufferings originate from true origins; how true cessations come about in dependence upon true paths. When we reflect on these teachings, the final conclusion we reach will be the same.

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### 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],

Of the nine defilements, what is the difference between the first three and the fourth, i.e., the difference between the latencies of the three poisons—dormant desire, dormant hatred and dormant obscuration—and the strong arousal of those three poisons?

*Student:* The first three refer to the non-manifest three poisons in the beings of the form and formless realms whereas the fourth one refers to the afflictions in the mind of desire realm beings.

- The first three dormant forms of the three poisons motivate the immovable karma that results in a rebirth in the form and formless realms.
- The three poisons in their manifest form result in the accumulation of the meritorious karma that leads to a rebirth in the desire realm.

When referring to the three dormant poisons, we do not necessarily have to posit

them to be seeds. What is being posited is that these are the afflictions that motivate the accumulation of immovable karma.

It is said that strong manifest anger does not motivate the accumulation of immovable karma, but manifest attachment and manifest ignorance (obscuration or bewilderment) can motivate the accumulation of immovable karma that is the projecting karma that results in a rebirth in the form and formless realms.

“The strong arousal [or manifestation] of those [three poisons]” refers mainly to the strong manifest anger that motivates the accumulation of the karma for rebirth in the desire realm. Strong manifest anger cannot motivate the accumulation of immovable karma. The accumulation of the projecting karma for rebirth in the desire realm can be manifest anger or manifest attachment or manifest ignorance.

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