

## **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 21**

**9 June 2015**

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Purpose and benefit of acquiring Dharma knowledge. Chapter One: *The Essence of a One Gone Thus*. Verse 131—132: The nine forms of defilements. Afflictive obscurations & knowledge obscurations. Difference between seeds & predispositions/imprints. Intellectually acquired afflictions & innate afflictions. Eight forbearances & eight knowledges.

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#### **PURPOSE AND BENEFIT OF ACQUIRING DHARMA KNOWLEDGE**

We have learnt quite a lot about the Three Jewels, having looked at the eight qualities of the Buddha Jewel, Dharma Jewel and Sangha Jewel. Since we have already studied these qualities, we should use this knowledge, apply what we have learnt and put them into practice.

For example, when we recite the prayer of going for refuge and generating bodhicitta—"I go for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha"—by recalling the eight qualities of the Buddha Jewel, such as it being uncompounded, spontaneous and so forth, and their meanings in our mind, that will help us to generate faith in the Buddha. The more qualities of the Buddha Jewel we can remember, the more beneficial it will be for us in terms of developing our faith in the Buddha Jewel.

Definitely at some point in time, all of us may have wondered what the purpose or benefit of learning all these enumerations and gathering so much knowledge is. However, it is very helpful if you are able to reflect on and think about this knowledge you have accumulated. For example, remembering the qualities of the Buddha Jewel is a condition for developing faith in the Buddha Jewel. If you can remember and recall those qualities, definitely it would be very helpful. But if you do not use, reflect or think about this knowledge, that is a completely different matter.

Likewise, if you know the eight qualities of the Dharma Jewel and the eight qualities of the Sangha Jewel, that would be very helpful in developing faith in the other Three Jewels.

Faith has to arise from seeing the reason, i.e., there must be a reason for faith to arise. If our faith in the Three Jewels is engendered by our knowledge and understanding of the qualities of the Three Jewels, the quality of our faith will be very good. I guess perhaps this is the main reason why we are studying and gathering all this knowledge.

When we recite the verse of going for refuge to the Three Jewels, we can pause after saying the word “Buddha” and think about the qualities of the Buddha Jewel. Likewise, we can pause after saying the word “Dharma” and think about the qualities of the Dharma Jewel. Likewise, we can pause after going for refuge to the Sangha and think about the qualities of the Sangha Jewel.

- When we think of the qualities of the Buddha Jewel, in brief, they are condensed into the qualities of knowledge, power and mercy (or compassion).
- When we think of the qualities of the Dharma Jewel, they can be condensed into the qualities of true cessations and qualities of true paths.

#### *Relationship to the tathagata essence*

When we think of the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, that will give rise to faith in our mind. Also when we reflect on their qualities and appreciate what they stand for, the feeling will come that these three objects of refuge are very good and a yearning will arise in our mind to actualise the Three Jewels for ourselves. We will want to become the Three Jewels. This will happen when we think about the Three Jewels in relation to the tathagata essence, our buddha nature. Be it the causal refuge or the resultant refuge, these come about because there is buddha nature, i.e., the tathagata essence does exist.

When we talked about the tathagata essence, there is the discussion of the clear light nature of the mind and the defilements being adventitious. These are established through various illustrations. When we say the defilements are adventitious, that means we can separate the defilements from the mind and that we ourselves can become the final Three Jewels, i.e., we can actualise the final Three Jewels.

A vast majority of people often wonder what the purpose of accumulating so much knowledge through studying these great treatises is. We can look at that as the condition to cultivate faith in the Three Jewels. In fact, whatever knowledge we have gathered through our studies must result in an increase of our faith and devotion in the Three Jewels. If our devotion in the Three Jewels increases as a result of gathering such knowledge, then we can say that the purpose of acquiring this knowledge has been fulfilled.

#### *Sign of having learnt the Dharma*

The great Kadampa masters of the past also said that the sign of having learnt the Dharma is that one becomes peaceful, serene and calm. That comes about through

acquiring the knowledge that comes through studying and learning. Then one's faith in the teachings and in the Three Jewels will increase and one will become gradually more disciplined, serene, calm and subdued.

The sign of having meditated is the lessening of our afflictions. If our afflictions such as the three poisons gradually weaken or decrease over time, that is the indication that our mind have familiarised itself with the teachings.

So the purpose of acquiring all this knowledge through studying and reflecting on them is not merely to acquire knowledge. The purpose is to increase our faith and devotion. As I have said, the great Kadampa masters had said that the sign of having learnt and reflected correctly on the teachings is when one becomes calmer and more pacified, peaceful and subdued. That is how we can check for ourselves whether our studies and our reflections have hit the spot or not and whether they are heading in the right direction. What are we looking out for? To see whether our faith and devotion is increasing or not. When you are meditating, check whether your meditation is fulfilling its purpose and also check whether your afflictions are weakening over time. If they are weakening over time, this indicates that your practice of meditation is on track.

In order to engender faith and devotion in our heart, we need to study and reflect on the teachings. In that way faith and devotion will arise. The Buddha had said in many sutras that faith is indispensable for the experiences and realisations of the path and that without faith, there is no way for positive experiences and realisations to arise.

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### THE NINE FORMS OF DEFILEMENTS

#### 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],

#### Verse 132

Are indicated by [the nine] examples

Of the covering of a lotus and so forth,  
But the divisions of coverings of afflictive emotions  
Are beyond the limits of number.

*The first four defilements*

Of the nine forms of defilements, I have explained the first four. The first three defilements are:

1. dormant desire
2. dormant anger
3. dormant obscuration

The fourth defilement is the strong arousal or manifestation of these three defilements.

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

The fifth defilement is level of the predispositions of ignorance. I guess we can posit them to be the knowledge obscuration. That should be OK.

Because of the level of the predispositions of ignorance, there is still exertion involved even though it may be a subtle exertion or subtle effort. The level of the predispositions of ignorance is the cause for the accumulation of uncontaminated karma, in dependence on which the bodhisattvas acquire the mental body. So even the bodhisattvas on the eighth, ninth and tenth grounds still need to depend on subtle exertion in order to work for sentient beings. By depending on this subtle exertion, they take on the mental body through which they work for sentient beings.

When one achieves enlightenment, the level of predispositions of ignorance would have been abandoned. As such, there is no longer any subtle exertion. It is an unshared quality of buddhas that they can work for the welfare of sentient beings such as giving teachings without having to arise from their meditative equipoise focussing on suchness. Only the buddhas can do that. The buddhas can work for sentient beings spontaneously and effortlessly, and their buddhas activities are uninterrupted, i.e., the enlightened activities of the buddhas are spontaneous, effortless and uninterrupted.

On the sentient beings' ground, i.e. during the time when one is a sentient being, when one is in meditative equipoise focussing on suchness, one sees only emptiness. One cannot see the diversities of phenomena so one cannot benefit sentient beings at that time. One is not able to work for sentient beings during that meditative equipoise as even the diversities of phenomena do not appear to that meditative equipoise.

*The sixth and seventh defilements: the path of seeing abandonments and the path of meditation abandonments*

The sixth and seventh defilements are the path of seeing abandonments and the path of meditation abandonments of which there are two:

1. the afflictive obscurations that hinder the achievement of liberation
2. the knowledge obscurations that hinder the achievement of omniscience

~ *Afflictive obscurations*

According to the CMWS:

- the apprehension of true existence is posited to be an afflictive obscuration
- the seeds that are deposited by this apprehension of true existence are also posited as an afflictive obscuration.

1. the apprehension of true existence
2. the seeds that are being deposited by this apprehension of true existence
3. the afflictions such as anger, attachment and so forth arising from those seeds

These three are afflictive obscurations that hinder the achievement of liberation and must be abandoned in order for liberation to be attained.

The four seals state:

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

Peace is nirvana or liberation. The abandonment of the afflictive obscurations result in nirvana so that is liberation. Why is nirvana peace? This is because it is the pacification of all the sufferings of cyclic existence. The source of all that suffering is the afflictions so when they are abandoned, one achieves peace.

All Buddhist tenets agree that selflessness must be realised in order to achieve liberation but most Buddhist tenets assert that one only needs to realise the selflessness of persons to achieve liberation.

However, according to the Consequence Middle Way School (CMWS), in order to achieve liberation, one must realise *both* the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena. Furthermore, the assertion of the CMWS as to what these two selflessnesses are is very different from the other Buddhist tenets.

To the CMWS, these two selflessnesses are not differentiated by their object of negation, i.e., true existence or inherent existence. So whether one is referring to the selflessness of persons or the selflessness of phenomena, the object of negation is the same, i.e., inherent existence. The difference between the two selflessnesses is made on the basis of emptiness. According to the CMWS:

- The person does not exist inherently. This is the emptiness or the selflessness of persons.
- The aggregates that are the bases of designation of persons also do not exist inherently. The emptiness of the aggregates is the selflessness of phenomena.

So the two selflessnesses are not differentiated by their object of negation, the emptiness of inherent existence, but by the basis of that emptiness—one being persons and the other being the aggregates.

In order to achieve liberation, one must abandon the afflictive obscurations. In order to abandon the afflictive obscurations, one must realise the selflessness of persons

and the selflessness of phenomena.

If you were asked, “Why is it that according to the CMWS one cannot become an arhat just by realising the selflessness of persons?” what would be your answer?

This question is addressed to everyone, in particular, to those who have studied this before.

*Khen Rinpoche: Quick. Anybody has the answer? The senior ones. Come. Come. It doesn't matter whether your answer is right or wrong.*

If anyone has the answer, please give your answer. If no one has the answer, then you all have to say that you do not know the answer. Either way, you have to say something.

*Student 1:* The arhat still has self-cherishing. Let's say he has already realised the selflessness of persons, then he will become a buddha instead of an arhat.

*Khen Rinpoche: You are not answering my question.*

If you really want to learn then you shouldn't be shy in giving an answer. The answer could be right or wrong but that is not the point. The point is that when you give an answer, you must also be willing to accept the challenge of defending your answer. When I question you, you must be able to defend your answer. Then there can be some further discussion. This should happen without you feeling shy or embarrassed. If you feel shy or embarrassed, you can't really learn. You end up learning nothing.

*Khen Rinpoche: Come on. I repeated my question twice already.*

Why is it that according to the CMWS one cannot become an arhat just by realising the selflessness of persons?

*Student 2:* When you realise the selflessness of a person, you are just realising the emptiness of oneself. However, you still have to contend with external phenomena besides the person that you see as inherently existent. Once you see anything external to yourself as inherently existent, the afflictions will still haunt you.

*Khen Rinpoche:* What is the problem if that individual still apprehends phenomena other than persons to be truly existent?

*Student 2:* Because you see things outside of oneself to be inherently existent, then you will react with either attachment or aversion. Your afflictions, their seeds and imprints will perpetuate and continue. You remain trapped in cyclic existence just the same.

*Khen Rinpoche: What you have said is correct!*

Earlier on, I said that what constitutes the afflictive obscurations are:

- the apprehension of a self of persons and the apprehension of a self of phenomena
- the seeds place by these apprehensions of true existence
- the afflictions such as anger and attachment that arise from those seeds

You need to destroy the enemy, the afflictions. Liberation means to be free from the suffering of cyclic existence. In order to be free from the suffering of cyclic existence, one must free oneself from the cause of samsara. The cause of samsara is the afflictive obscurations. I have already mentioned what constitute the afflictive obscurations. Since the grasping or apprehension of the self of persons and the self of phenomena are included among afflictive obscurations, then one must realise both the emptiness of persons and the emptiness of the aggregates in order to achieve liberation.

~ *Knowledge obscurations*

What is a knowledge obscuration? There is this mistake or fault that is the appearance of true existence. Whatever appears to us sentient beings always appears to be truly existent. This factor of mistaken appearance does not accord with reality and it arises from the predispositions or imprints placed by the apprehension of true existence.

~ *Difference between seeds and predispositions/imprints*

With regard to the seeds and predispositions/imprints, often these two are referring to the same thing and these terms can be used interchangeably. But there are also times when they refer to two different things. In those instances, there is a distinction between the seeds and the predispositions/imprints. We can take it that the seeds are coarser and the predispositions/imprints are subtler.

We need to differentiate between the seeds that are deposited by the apprehension of true existence and the predispositions/imprints that are deposited by the apprehension of true existence. Earlier on, I have said that:

- the seed that is deposited by the apprehension of true existence is an afflictive obscuration
- the predisposition/imprint that is deposited by the apprehension of true existence is a knowledge obscuration

What is the difference then between a seed and a predisposition/imprint?

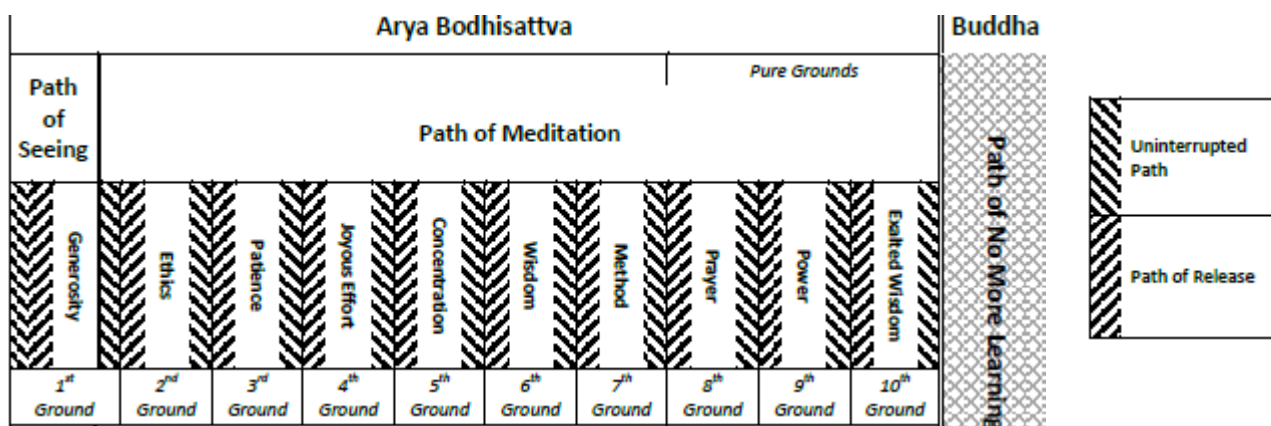
- The seed that is deposited by the apprehension of true existence has the capacity to generate another moment of apprehension of true existence. As long as there is this capacity to produce a new moment of apprehension of true existence, it is called a seed.
- The predisposition/imprint placed by the apprehension of true existence does *not* have the capacity to produce a new moment of apprehension of true existence. Rather, it only has the capacity to produce the factor of mere appearance, i.e., the mistaken appearance of true existence.

~ *When abandonment occurs*

According to the CMWS, when one becomes a hearer foe destroyer or solitary realiser foe destroyer, the afflictive obscurations are abandoned. From the perspective of the Mahayana, the afflictive obscurations are abandoned when one first achieves the eighth ground.

Although the hearer foe destroyer and the solitary realiser foe destroyer have abandoned the afflictive obscurations, they are not buddhas because they still have the level of the predispositions of ignorance that have yet to be abandoned. They still have to depend on subtle exertion, accumulate uncontaminated karma and take on a mental body.

When are the knowledge obscurations abandoned? They are abandoned when one becomes a buddha, when one achieves the path of release of the path of no-more-learning.



~ *Intellectually acquired afflictions and innate afflictions*

There are afflictive obscurations that are abandoned on the path of seeing—the path of seeing abandonments—and afflictive obscurations that are abandoned on the path of meditation—the path of meditation abandonments. How do we differentiate between the two?

There is the thought apprehending the ‘I’ to be truly existent that arises from:

- adopting certain mistaken philosophical positions or tenets
- incorrect thinking adhering to certain intellectual concepts

This is an intellectually acquired affliction that is a path of seeing abandonment. One can also posit that there are the seeds that are deposited by such an apprehension of the ‘I’ and I guess one should also be able to posit the instances of anger, attachment and so forth that arise through the force of those seeds.

Having said that, are those afflictions such as attachment and anger that arise from those seeds also intellectually acquired? If you were to say that the afflictions that arise from those seeds are innate, you are going to have a problem. Because you are asserting that there are innate afflictions that can arise from something that is intellectually acquired.



Do you understand what I'm saying?

*Khen Rinpoche: No? Some say no, some say yes.*

If there is anything that you don't understand, perhaps you can tell me what it is. Then maybe I can try to explain again. This could be difficult for those of you who are new and are hearing this for the first time. But for those of you who have heard this before, I guess it shouldn't be difficult.

Then there are afflictions that are innate, i.e., they arise naturally. These innate afflictions are the path of meditation abandonments and cannot be abandoned by the path of seeing. They have to be abandoned by the path of meditation. There are also seeds deposited by these afflictions that are also path of meditation abandonments. The afflictions such as anger and attachment that arise due to the force of the seeds deposited by the innate apprehension of true existence are also afflictions that are path of meditation abandonments.

The intellectually acquired afflictions are abandoned by the path of seeing whereas the innate afflictions can be abandoned only by meditating on the path of meditation. As such, the path of meditation abandonments are more difficult to abandon than the path of seeing abandonments. In other words, this means the path of seeing abandonments are easier to abandon than the path of meditation abandonments.

The knowledge obscurations are not classified in the same way as the afflictive obscurations. For instance, we would not say that there are knowledge obscurations that are path of seeing abandonments and knowledge obscurations that are path of meditation abandonments. According to the Prasangikas, the knowledge obscurations can only be abandoned through the power of the path of meditation.

The process of abandoning the afflictive obscurations lasts all the way up to the achievement of the eighth ground. The process of abandoning the knowledge obscurations only starts from the eighth ground and takes place over the three pure grounds, i.e., the eighth, ninth and tenth grounds.

From this, you can see that the process of abandoning the afflictions is no mean feat and is really not easy even if we are starting from the path of accumulation. On the path of accumulation and the path of preparation, a bodhisattva starts by weakening the afflictions. Only when the bodhisattva achieves the path of seeing for the first time is he then able to overcome the intellectually acquired afflictions.

But at that time, the process of abandoning the innate afflictions has not even started. That process only starts upon entry into the path of meditation and lasts till the achievement of the eighth ground. Only then are the innate afflictions completely vanquished. And it is only after that that the process of abandoning the knowledge obscurations begins.

- On the path of accumulation, the bodhisattva strives in the vast accumulation of merit and the purification of negativities with the purpose of abandoning the

obscurations. Due to the force of that accumulation of merit and purification, he is then able to work with his afflictions and gain some attainments.

- On the path of preparation, the bodhisattva realises emptiness via a generic image. He has yet to realise emptiness directly.
- The bodhisattva realises the suchness of the four noble truths only when he achieves the path of seeing. This is when he realises emptiness directly for the first time. Because of seeing emptiness directly for the first time, this is called the path of seeing. When the bodhisattva first achieves the path of seeing, he realises the suchness of the four noble truths. During meditative equipoise, even the four noble truths do not appear. What he sees is the suchness of the four noble truths. What appears is mere vacuity, the absence of the object of negation.

~ *Eight forbearances and eight knowledges*

We have to understand that the path of seeing is divided into the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing and the path of release of the path of seeing. With regard to the uninterrupted path and the path of release of the path of seeing, there are what we call the eight forbearances and the eight knowledges.

When the bodhisattva achieves the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing, he achieves the forbearance of Dharma, where he realises the suchness of true suffering. Likewise, there are the suchness of true origins, the suchness of true cessations and the suchness of true paths. These realisations are the four forbearances of Dharma. They are so-called from the perspective of being the realisation of the suchness of the four noble truths. This is according to the perspective of the CMWS.

Then there are the wisdoms that realise the suchness of the four noble truths. The suchness of those wisdoms that realise the suchness of the four noble truths are called the subsequent forbearances.

These are the eight forbearances. They are nominally different but they are of one entity, i.e., they are one entity but different isolates.

The eight forbearances are the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing while the eight knowledges occur on the path of release of the path of seeing.

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