

Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi

Root text: *Presentation of Tenets* by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltzen, translated by Glen Svensson; April 2005. Copyright: Glen Svensson. Reproduced for use in the FPMT Basic Program with permission from Glen Svensson

Lightly edited and some footnotes added by Joan Nicell, Istituto Lama Tsong Khapa, October 2005.

All page references refer to this root text unless otherwise stated.

Lesson No: 1

Date: 19th February 2013

The saviour Nagarjuna said, “Through the accumulation of both the collections of method and wisdom, one will achieve the two enlightened bodies, the truth body and the form body.” The final object of attainment of the Mahayana path is enlightenment in which the state of existence is the unification of the truth body and the form body. In order to achieve this state of existence, that is, the unification of the truth body and the form body, one has to create the causes for doing so. As Nagarjuna said, one has to accumulate the two collections: the collection of merit and the collection of wisdom.

In order to engage in the cultivation of a path where there is the accumulation of both the collections of merit and wisdom, one’s practice must be founded on a correct understanding of what constitutes reality. In technical philosophical language, one must have an understanding of what the *basis* is. Specifically, we are talking about the correct understanding of the two truths:

- In order to be able to accumulate the collection of wisdom, one must have a thorough understanding of the presentation of the ultimate truth.
- In order to be able to accumulate the collection of merit, one must have an understanding of the presentation of the conventional truth.

This is very important.

It is for this reason that we are studying the subject of tenets. When we study the tenets, we are trying to understand what constitutes reality, both the conventional truth and the ultimate truth.

The final view of the two truths is in accordance with the presentation of the highest tenets, the Consequence Middle Way school. Why then do we need to study the tenets of the lower schools? Because an understanding of the lower tenets will make us appreciate and be able to understand better the ultimate presentation of the two truths.

Why must we have a better understanding of the conventional truth? We need to understand better the conventional truth in order to be able to accumulate the collection of merit, i.e., to be able to engage in the method aspect of the path.

As long as a phenomenon in question is a *composed phenomenon*, its existence is dependent on causes and conditions. Composed phenomena arise from the gathering, coming together, and interplay of many causes and conditions.

For example, in order for a sprout to arise, many causes and conditions must come together. We need to have the seed, water, fertiliser, the correct temperature, and so forth. It is not as if one or two conditions are more important than the others. All the necessary causes and conditions must come together. Then as soon as the necessary causes and conditions come together, we get the result, the sprout. In the case of the production of the sprout, we can see that the sprout is dependently-arisen, that its existence is due to the coming together of the necessary causes and conditions mentioned earlier.

Here we are talking about dependent-arising on the level of causality, i.e., on the level of causes and conditions.

If you remember what we studied in the previous module on *Lorig*, for a consciousness, for example, an eye consciousness apprehending blue to be generated, three conditions must be present:

1. The observed object condition
2. The uncommon empowering condition
3. The immediately preceding condition

Only when these three conditions come together can an eye consciousness apprehending blue be generated.

When the causes for the production of a particular phenomenon come together, then that phenomenon will arise. This is the result of the coming together of causes and conditions. This is an irreversible process. We cannot do anything about it because when the causes and conditions come together, they will have their corresponding effects.

In order for any composed phenomena to arise, all the causes and conditions must come together. If any of the required causes for production is missing - even just one or two conditions - that particular phenomenon will not arise. No one can do anything about that. Not even the numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas who have limitless qualities and powers.

We all want realisations to arise in our mind, be it a big or small realisation. However in order for any realisation to arise in our mind, the necessary causes and conditions must come together. Otherwise realisations will not arise. If we want realisations, we have to gather all the necessary causes and conditions for them to arise. Specifically we have to understand the instruction of our teachers correctly. The instructions that we receive from our teachers have to hit the mark.

It also depends on how we go about accumulating merit and how we perform the purification practices, i.e., whether our practices of accumulating merit and purifying our mind of obscurations also hit the mark.

When all these conditions are fulfilled - i.e., understanding correctly the teacher's instructions that will impact the mind and hit the mark, and our accumulation of merit and purification practices also hitting the mark - only then will the desired realisations occur.

Whether the instructions of the guru can actually be effective for your mind, move your heart, and hit the mark, that boils down to whether you have devotion towards that particular guru or not. When one has single-pointed devotion and faith in the guru, even receiving a single piece of advice will touch

the heart. For some people, that alone can be a life-changing experience. It boils down to having faith and devotion.

When you do not have such devotion and trust in the guru from whom you have received instructions and teachings, even if he were to teach you the entire *Tengyur* (all the collected teachings of the Buddha) and confer upon you many initiations, those instructions or initiations may not have any impact on your mind and may not move your heart at all.

One of the major outlines of the *Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, the *Lam-rim Chen-mo*, states that the root of the path is correct devotion to the virtuous friend. After you have relied upon him, you then undertake the proper graduated training, i.e., the entire lam-rim, starting from the contemplation of the human life of leisure and opportunity up to the achievement of enlightenment. All these topics fall under the outline, “The stages of how to train the mind after relying on the guru.” This comes after the first outline, “The root of the path: The way to rely on a spiritual teacher.”

What does this indicate? This shows very clearly that if you want all the realisations, starting from an understanding of this human life of leisure and opportunity up to the achievement of enlightenment, it is dependent on faith in the virtuous friend or guru. Without that kind of devotion and faith, all those realisations and experiences will not arise. This is the implication.

This is my personal experience. All of you can look at your own experiences. It is quite evident that when we receive instructions or teachings from the guru with a mind of faith, particularly, with single-pointed devotion, even hearing a few sentences will have a profound impact on the mind and move the heart. That is very clear.

Going back to the final object of attainment of the Mahayana path, our final goal is the achievement of the two bodies, the truth body and the form body. The achievement of these two bodies is completely dependent on generating all the realisations of the path. In order to generate all the realisations of the path, we need to ensure that all the necessary causes and conditions for generating these realisations come together. For that reason therefore, we need an understanding of the conventional aspect of reality, the presentation of the conventional truth. Therefore we need an understanding of dependent-arising at the level of causality.

There are different levels of subtleties with regard to the meaning of dependent-arising. At the obvious coarse level, we talk about dependent-arising on the level of causality, such as that an effect depends on its cause. It is through an understanding of the coarse meaning of dependent-arising that we come to understand what is beneficial and what is non-beneficial, what is virtuous and what is non-virtuous, and what should be cultivated or adopted and what should be abandoned.

If we were to talk about emptiness right from the onset, with statements such as “Everything is empty. Things are empty of inherent existence,” it would be difficult for us to engage in any meaningful practice of abandoning what is to be abandoned and cultivating what is to be cultivated.

But when one has the proper understanding of dependent-arising on the level of causality, our faith in karma and the law of cause and effect will increase. With that understanding of dependent-arising on the level of causality, it will help us in our practice of the cultivation of love, compassion, and the altruistic intention. Likewise this also applies to our practice of the perfections.

Many of you may have heard this before. Je Rinpoche Lama Tsongkhapa once asked Manjushri, “What is the quickest way to realise the subtle meaning of dependent-arising, i.e., to actualise the correct view of reality, emptiness?”

Manjushri replied, “You need to do three things:

1. Make heartfelt request to the guru who is inseparable from your meditational deity.
2. Strive in the accumulation of merit and purify the mind of obscurations.
3. Study and analyse the great treatises.”

When you think about Manjushri’s reply, essentially it means that:

1. You need faith.
2. You need a lot of merit.
3. You need to purify the mind of obscurations because of the immeasurable amount of negativities obscuring the mind.
4. You have to put in effort to study, learn, and think about the meaning of the teachings.

In order for us to realise the ultimate nature of reality, emptiness, all these causes and conditions must come together. We cannot have one and leave out the others.

We are here to learn about the two facets of reality: the conventional truth and the ultimate truth. We are unravelling in our mind the meaning of dependent-arising at all its levels, from the coarse to its subtlest level: starting with dependent-arising at the level of causality, followed by dependent-arising in terms of dependence on parts, and dependent-arising in its subtlest form, how things are dependently designated.

Through understanding these facets of reality, one comes to have a very clear understanding of what we are supposed to abandon and what we should be cultivating. Therefore we should keep this in mind right from the very beginning.

Why are studying this text? Of course it is for the goal mentioned earlier - ultimately, it is to achieve the two enlightened bodies, to achieve enlightenment. In order to do that, we need to have a correct understanding of the different facets of reality. For that purpose, we will spend time looking into this text. We should generate this motivation from the beginning based on our understanding of the reasons for studying this text. Then we should practise with enthusiasm, joy, and happiness.

We must be aware that during the course of such an undertaking, sometimes we will experience problems and obstacles such as having difficulties in our work, we may suddenly fall sick, and so forth. These things will happen. When these things occur, then it is very important to make heartfelt requests to the guru who is inseparable from one’s deity.

We also need to strive as much as possible in the practices of accumulating merit and purification because we have so much negativities and obscurations. Even though we strive in our studies, we may find the text difficult to understand. Then we have to work at taming the different layers of obscurations and negativities.

At the same time, we have to continuously read the text and think about it. From our side, we need to put effort into this.

The subject matter that we are dealing with is quite difficult and challenging, but if we were to get discouraged from the very beginning, just because we find it difficult, then nothing will work. We are the ones who are stopping ourselves from learning.

For those who really want to learn about tenets, you should have this attitude, “I will try my best. No matter how hard it is, I will put in the time and effort.”

In order to engage in the practice of the person of great capacity, one has to transition from the practices that are shared with the person of small and medium capacities. We have to move forward step by step. This is just talking about sutra.

After that one then transitions from sutra to tantra. Many of you may have heard that tantra is the swift path to enlightenment. But what makes it possible to achieve enlightenment so quickly through the practice of tantra? One of the main factors that determines whether tantra can be a quick path to enlightenment or not is one’s practice of guru devotion. That is very important in tantra practice. That is where you have the practice of guru yoga. When you think about and analyse why tantra is such a quick path to enlightenment, it all boils down to the practice of guru yoga.

You may have also heard of the noble eightfold path. The first is right view. Why is right view the first of the noble eightfold path? This implies that whatever we do, including cultivating the paths and so forth, is done on the basis of an understanding of what reality is. That is the implication. In technical philosophical language, it is the understanding of the basis. In layman’s language, it is the understanding of what constitutes reality.

In the context of our philosophical studies here, we are talking about the two truths. When we have the correct understanding of these two facets of reality, the conventional truth and the ultimate truth, then whatever understanding and our judgement of things and events will always be correct because our understanding and judgment are founded on reality. We understand reality as it is. Based on that right view, i.e., the correct understanding of what constitutes reality, our thoughts and opinions would be correct because they will be founded on reality. We understand the situation as it is.

With that kind of right view, one would also tend to have right speech. Based on the understanding of what constitutes reality, our speech, in terms of its presentation and meaning, would be correct. It will be right speech.

Similarly there will be right action. With right view, whatever actions one undertakes would be correct.

Based on right view, when one has right speech and right action, then there will be right livelihood, i.e., we will be able to live our life correctly and live a virtuous life.

One would also have right effort. Whether it is the effort applied to one's practice or whatever one undertakes in life, one will have right effort.

One also has right mindfulness. When we have some control over our body, speech, and mind, it is much easier to have mindfulness and introspection.

With proper mindfulness and introspection, it is much easier to develop concentration. This is where right concentration comes in.

To summarise, having a correct understanding of the different facets of reality is very important. In order to have the right view of reality, we need to have an understanding of the different facets of reality. In this case, we are referring to the conventional truth. By understanding the conventional truth, one understands dependent-arising on the level of causality, how causes and conditions must come together for a desired effect to arise.

Based on that correct understanding of the conventional facet of reality, then one will be able to gradually cultivate and acquire right speech and so forth, culminating in the achievement of right concentration.

From this short discussion, you can see why it is so important to study, to learn, and to think about the teachings. Learning, studying, hearing, and reflection are very important because there are many people who do not see the value of such activities. In this world, there are many Buddhists who think that there is no need to study so much. That is a big mistake.

As I have said before, when we think about it, the more we know, the greater the depth of our reflection. The more teachings we hear and the more we study, then the depth of our reflection will increase because the depth of our reflection is commensurate with the depth of our learning. The depth of our meditation is in turn commensurate with the depth of our reflection. From this, you can see the importance of learning and reflection.

Having said this, learning and reflection are not easy. They are challenging. There will always be difficulties but you need to see how important they are. Then even when difficulties arise, you will be willing to put up with them and try your best to overcome them because you have seen the importance of learning and reflection. This advice is for those who really want to learn.

Another thing to note is that this is a long-term undertaking. We need to accumulate our understanding over time because we need to have extensive knowledge. As it takes time, therefore we need to put in the time. It is not going to be accomplished by coming to class once or twice, thinking "I will come and then I will not come." Nothing will happen when you do that.

If you really want to learn, it is important that you must try your best not to miss classes. You must come to class continuously. Continuity is very important.

Many causes and conditions need to come together. On top of coming to class uninterruptedly, reading the text and discussions are also important.

When we are able to gather together all the abovementioned conditions, even if you do not understand everything, definitely you will get something out of your studies.

If nothing happens even after you have tried to gather all these conditions together, then we will see what needs to be done.

But if before even attempting to gather all these causes and conditions - if you do not come to classes, you do not read the text, you do not think about and analyse the teachings, and you do not come to the discussions - you come to tell me that you don't understand, then what am I going to do?

Look at the external world. Going back to our example of the sprout, even just for a sprout to arise, the necessary causes and conditions must come together. It is exactly the same thing for the internal world of the mind. In order for the positive mental states of realisations and experiences to arise, we require all the necessary conditions to come together. If you have understood what I said today, then as much as possible put in your time and effort and try your best.

Translated by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme

Transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek and Vivien Ng

Edited by Cecilia Tsong

Checked by Shirley Soh