

Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi

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

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

Lesson No: 9

Date: 28th March 2013

Question: What is the meaning of “one sitting” in terms of travelling through the five paths?

Answer: One sitting literally means just that. For example, the bodhisattva achieves enlightenment by progressing from the heat stage of the path of preparation all the way up to the path of no-more-learning in one sitting. That means he enters meditative equipoise on the heat stage of the path of preparation and, within that meditative equipoise, achieves all the paths and manifests enlightenment without arising into the subsequent attainment, i.e., without arising into the post-meditative session.

Student: (Inaudible)

Khen Rinpoche: You have read the story of the Buddha? How long did he take to become enlightened? One year? Two months? You read the Buddha’s story first.

Don’t worry about the Buddha. If you have to sit on that seat, don’t worry about not going to the toilet because it takes just a couple of hours and occurs overnight!

Khen Rinpoche: Getting enlightened happens overnight, not one year, not ten years, according to the story of the Buddha.

Prior to entering meditative equipoise, the Buddha had already engaged in many practices of austerity. Then he sat under the bodhi tree. Hosts of maras came to disturb him. After overcoming them, he entered meditative equipoise. In that one meditative equipoise, he progressed from the heat stage of the path of preparation all the way to the path of no-more-learning within a few hours. It was an overnight thing.

Question: What is the boundary for saying someone is a proponent of a particular tenet? We are studying tenets now. Does that make us proponents of tenets?

Answer: In order for us to be proponents of Buddhist tenets, obviously we need to be Buddhists and we must have accepted the Three Jewels as our objects of refuge. In the beginning of this module, we explained the meaning of tenets, i.e., it means an established conclusion. As long as in your mind you accept any one

of the four schools and think, “Yes, it is definitely like that,” and you are also able to propound to others what you have accepted by using logic and reasoning, perhaps then you could be said to be a proponent of that school of Buddhist tenets.

If you remember in our earlier discussions, a proponent of Buddhist tenets is also someone who necessarily has accepted the four seals. That means you have thought about the four seals and accepted them, “It is definitely like that.”

Question: There are so many sub-schools within the GES. When we are learning the tenets of the GES, may I assume that we are studying the position held by the majority of the various schools?

Answer: Although there are eighteen sub-schools within the GES, in general, what we have studied is the general presentation and is accepted by the vast majority of them.

Question: How does the nirvana without remainder exist without depending on a basis?

Answer: There is definitely a substance that is the basis for a nirvana without remainder. As you know, in the GES, if something exists, it is necessarily substantially established. That means there must be a substance there.

However when a nirvana without remainder is actualised, the continua of the body and mind are severed. But we have to say that there is a basis. When you achieve a nirvana without remainder, the continua of the body and mind are severed, but still there is a nirvana without remainder. A nirvana without remainder exists. The question is how does it exist? This is something we need to think about.

What if we were to say that there is a substance that is a non-associated compositional factor?

Student: Is it a person?

Khen Rinpoche: The person is gone; it is dead.

Student: I was trying to figure out what that non-associated compositional factor could be. There is no person there but there is a nirvana without remainder.

Khen Rinpoche: When you look at this from the GES’ fundamental worldview and ask what the substance for a nirvana without remainder is, probably we can only say that it is a non-associated compositional factor. There is nothing more we can say about this.

This is just the assertion of the GES. In reality, the continuum of the mind in particular cannot be severed because the mind has no beginning and it will have no end.

Whoever is standing there, asking questions, you also have to listen to what they are asking. Otherwise it becomes a conversation between two individuals. Then there is no benefit. Everybody has to be involved. Whatever is being asked, you should have the idea that the person is also asking you and you must be able to

think of an answer.

Khen Rinpoche: You must think that they are asking you, not asking me. Now prepare your answer!

Question: For the bodhisattva who achieves a nirvana without remainder, he has no more body or mind. How then does the GES assert that a buddha is able to benefit sentient beings in countless ways?

Answer: When the (hearer and solitary realiser) arhats achieve a nirvana with remainder, they also abandon the non-afflictive obscurations, but this abandonment comes about, not through the force of an antidote, but through the basis of the continua of body and mind having gone out of existence.

The GES asserts that a buddha's form aggregate also ceases to exist after achieving a nirvana without remainder so they do not assert a buddha manifesting to give teachings and benefiting sentient beings. According to this school, after a buddha has passed into the nirvana without remainder, you probably would have to say that what remains is a non-associated compositional factor.

Unlike the Mahayana, the GES do not assert that, after the Buddha passed into parinirvana without remainder, the Buddha remained, emanating and doing work for sentient beings.

Question: Is there any difference between “substantially existent” and “substantially established”? If there is a difference, what is the difference?

Answer: According to this school:

- a substantially existent is mutually inclusive with an ultimate truth.
- everything that exists is necessarily substantially established, i.e., all phenomena are substantially established, truly established, or existing by way of their own character.

In order to understand what “substantially existent” means, you just have to think about the definition of an ultimate truth. According to the definition, as long as a phenomenon is such that an awareness apprehending it is not cancelled if it is broken up or mentally separated into its individual parts, that phenomenon is an ultimate truth and it is substantially existent.

Question: How do we know that we are not over-negating the “I” when we are meditating on the self-sufficient substantially existent “I” according to this school?

Answer: We are talking about this from the perspective of this school. Whenever you want to negate the self that does not exist, you first must identify correctly what exactly is the thing that you are negating.

- First, the most important step is to always identify correctly the object of negation or the object of refutation.
- After having identified correctly the target, one has to understand that the “I” definitely exists. The question is *not* whether the “I” exists or not, as the “I” does exist. The question is *how* does the “I” exist?

The “I” exists but the object of negation here, the self-sufficient substantially existent person does not exist. This is what we are trying to understand: why is it that such a self-sufficient substantially existent person does not exist?

According to this school, we must differentiate between:

- the “I” that exists, i.e., the substantially existent “I,” and
- the “I” that does not exist, i.e., the self-sufficient substantially existent person.

Question: What is the difference between a hearer and a solitary realiser? What is the heat stage of the path?

Answer: Perhaps the concept of the difference between a hearer and a solitary realiser will be clearer when we reach the AMWS. When we reach that section and, if we have time, perhaps we can try to see the difference between the two.

As for the four divisions of the path of preparation—heat, peak, forbearance, and supreme mundane qualities—for now it is enough that you know that there are these four divisions. If we are to go into them now, I am not sure whether there is any benefit or not.

Question: Regarding the phrase, “Propounding the three times to be particulars [i.e., instances] of substances,” what is the meaning of “substance” here?

Answer: In this context, it means any phenomenon that exists. According to this school, anything that exists is necessarily substantially established. If it is an established base, it is necessarily a substance. In this context, a “substance” refers to an existent.

Question: The tree is a past sprout. It will also cease to exist and become something else, for example, when it is burnt to ashes. At the time of becoming ashes, does the past sprout still exist?

Another student: I will give the example of a mother. The mother has already died and become a past mother. When the mother is cremated and her body becomes ashes, are the ashes considered to be the past mother?

Answer: We go back to the example of the golden vessel, about the past, present, and future. The point here is that the examples serve to illustrate that there is a substance in the past, in the present, and in the future. I am not sure whether you can say that the mother’s substance exists after the mother has passed away and she is no longer around.

Question: Are the modes of apprehension of these two minds the same:

1. the mind apprehending a permanent, unitary, and independent person and
2. the mind apprehending the self-sufficient substantially existent person that is intellectually acquired?

Answer: As I mentioned before, first, you have to be clear about the modes of apprehension of these two minds:

- For the apprehension of a permanent, unitary, and independent self, what is the particular way that this mind apprehends the self?
- For the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, this mind also has a particular way of apprehending the self. What is its manner of

apprehending the self?

Many texts say that the apprehension of the permanent, unitary, and independent self is the coarse apprehension of a self and that it is intellectually acquired.

For the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, such a mind can be intellectually acquired or it can be innate.

One of the sub-schools of the GES, the Followers of Vatsiputra, the Vatsiputriyas, assert a self-sufficient substantially existent person. Their assertion is intellectually acquired because it is a result of their own thinking. It is their tenet, their belief, and their own conclusion, but nevertheless it is something that came about through thinking, through the intellect. So the Vatsiputriyas' mode of apprehension of the self-sufficient substantially existent person is an intellectually acquired apprehension.

The mode of apprehension of this mind apprehending self-sufficient substantially existent person is not exactly the same as the mode of apprehension of a permanent, unitary, and independent self.

Question: If these modes of apprehension are different, why is it that when the person realises that the self-sufficient substantially existent person does not exist, he necessarily realises that the self is not permanent, unitary, and independent?

Answer: When you realise the emptiness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, you also realise the emptiness of a permanent, unitary, and independent self.

This is because the intellectually acquired afflictions are the abandonments of the path of seeing. Specifically they are abandoned by the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing. It is at the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing that you realise the emptiness of the self-sufficient substantially existent person. That uninterrupted path of the path of seeing abandons the intellectually acquired afflictions.

According to the GES, there is a way of looking at the path of seeing in terms of the eight moments of knowledge and the eight moments of forbearance. One can apply that to the afflictions of the three realms, the desire realms, the form, and the formless realms. The point is that these afflictions of the three realms have to be abandoned serially, not simultaneously on the path of seeing.

Since in the path of seeing there are these eight moments of forbearance and eight moments of knowledge, that means there are eight uninterrupted paths and eight paths of release. I didn't explain this in class because there is too much information and there is no time. It is in the reference text.¹ For those of you who are interested, you can read this on your own. If there is anything you do not understand, you can bring it up in class.

Question: Can I clarify the point that was made just now regarding the mode of

¹ Refer to page 207 – 209 in *Cutting Through Appearances*.

apprehension of a permanent, unitary, and independent person and the mode of apprehension of the intellectually acquired self-sufficient substantially existent person. How are they apprehended differently?

Answer: Isn't there a difference in their mode of apprehension?

What is the manner of apprehending the self by the mind that sees a self to be permanent, unitary, and independent? What about the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person? How does this mind apprehend the self?

We are comparing these two minds: the apprehension of a permanent, unitary, and independent self and the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. First we establish that these two minds are different. These two minds have their own mode of apprehension and their objects of the mode of apprehension are also different.

Then you look at the intellectually acquired affliction and the innate affliction. In the case of the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, there is an apprehension that is intellectually acquired and an apprehension that is innate. The difference between these two lies in:

- whether that affliction is the result of a process of thinking, which means that it is intellectually acquired, or
- whether that affliction is innate or natural.

Student: What I understood from the previous class (Lesson 6) is different from this. The part about it being thought (i.e., coming from a process of thinking) was not mentioned. These modes of apprehension were differentiated by whether the person and the aggregates are of separate entity or not. My understanding is: if they are apprehended to be separate entities, then that apprehension will be considered intellectually acquired. If they are not apprehended to be completely separate entities, then that is considered innate.

Ven Gyurme: That was a comparison between the intellectually acquired apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person versus the apprehension of a permanent, unitary, and independent self. That was the explanation for the difference between these two minds.

Question: Khen Rinpoche had explained last week the three vehicles and how the three paths are traversed. It seems that, at the end of those paths, the consciousness is severed in all three instances. A nirvana without remainder means that the consciousness is severed. I am trying to understand what is the point of engaging in any of the paths if, in the end, everything is severed? What is the point of practising then?

Answer: We must always keep in mind that our discussions here are done from the perspective of the GES.

There is a difference between a Mahayana arhat and a Hinayana arhat. A buddha is called a Mahayana arhat that is the result of having accumulated merit over three countless great eons. What does it mean to be a Mahayana arhat? It means being all-knowing, i.e., knowing everything because of having abandoned even the non-afflictive obscurations. This is very different from a Hinayana arhat.

When one does not have any non-afflictive obscurations, that means one knows everything. When one knows everything, working for others is an easier job because one can see exactly what needs to be done to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings. It does not matter how long one lives, for as long as one is around, one will always do one's best to benefit others. When it is time to die, then it is finished. That is the real nirvana, peace, isn't it?

Regarding the consciousness or mind going out of existence, this is from a Hinayana not a Mahayana perspective. Regarding the continuum of the consciousness being severed at the time of achieving a nirvana without remainder, this is a tenet and is not necessarily the reality.

If you think about it, it is difficult to explain using logic how the continuum of the consciousness can be severed? If you apply logic and reasoning, definitely you will see the internal contradictions. On the one hand, they assert that there are past and future lives, and then, suddenly If you apply logic, it is difficult to hold on to that position. Because you can find faults in this assertion, therefore this is not the final view.

Question: With regard to the third seal, all phenomena are selfless, would it be clearer if this is expressed as, "phenomenon that is the self of person is selfless"? Because the two lower tenets do not assert the self of phenomena. That would contradict this third seal, all phenomena are selfless.

Khen Rinpoche: A senior student can answer this.

Answer by senior student: "All phenomena" here include the objects of use of such a self of person. If the self of person does not exist, the objects of use which include external phenomena also does not exist.

Khen Rinpoche: According to the GES and the SS, any phenomena that exist are necessarily empty of being self-sufficient, empty of such a self. When we talk about "self" in this context, it is not necessarily about a person. "Self" sometimes means the person, but here we are talking about the self, i.e., being self-sufficient.

According to the first two tenets, all phenomena are necessarily empty of being self-sufficient. If you take "self" to mean being self-sufficient, then there is nothing wrong in saying all phenomena are empty and selfless. This is how it is phrased in the third seal. There is no problem.

For the GES and the SS, when you look at a vase, they have to say that the vase lacks a self. The vase is empty of self so don't think in terms of the English language. "Self" is not necessarily referring to the person.

Question: A proponent of Buddhist tenets is someone who has understood the four seals and accepts them to be true. Can this acceptance just be at the level of a correct assumption or must it be a realisation, i.e., at the very least, an inferential cognition?

Answer: I think it is not necessary that a person has an inferential cognition of the four seals in order to qualify as a proponent of Buddhist tenets. But the person must have thought about them using reasoning and arrive at a correct assumption.

Question: The root text states, “An example of ultimate truth is a temporal partless consciousness.” The word “temporal” gives rise to a feeling that it is something that arises and ceases, so how can it be an ultimate truth?

Answer: Does the smallest moment of consciousness cease to exist or not? Can the shortest moment of consciousness go out of existence or not? Can such a phenomenon cease to exist or not? What is the basic building block of the continuum of consciousness?

Student: This partless moment of consciousness.

Khen Rinpoche: If this partless moment of consciousness ceases to exist, can you have consciousness in the first place? Isn't consciousness always there?

Student: So this temporal partless consciousness is actually findable upon any consciousness, i.e., it is the smallest building block of consciousness? Is this temporal partless consciousness indivisible, i.e., it cannot be divided when you search within consciousness?

Answer: Yes.

Question: In Lesson 4, it was said that a mind apprehending a person would never cease. That is why a person is an ultimate truth. But now we understand that a person does not exist after one has achieved arhatship or buddhahood without remainder. It follows then that the mind apprehending person will cease after one has achieved arhatship or buddhahood without remainder. Therefore a person is a conventional truth because the mind apprehending it ceases to exist.

Khen Rinpoche: OK then. Next?

Question: If a partless particle is indestructible, how can it go out of existence? It is the same for the partless consciousness? Because the body and mind are built up of directionally partless particles and temporally partless moments of consciousness, the mind apprehending them do not go out of existence because they are the smallest units and cannot be mentally or physically separated. This gives rise to the feeling that they are indestructible. But when the person achieves arhatship, everything is suddenly cut. This seems contradictory.

Ven Gyurme (paraphrasing): If the temporal partless moments of consciousness that are the building blocks of consciousness and the directionally partless particles that are the building blocks of matter are said to be forever existing, how can consciousness and matter go out of existence?

Answer: That is why we are finding out the faults of the tenets here. There are such faults so don't take them too seriously.

Question: Is compounded space permanent or impermanent? What is the difference between compounded space and uncompounded space?

Answer: You can take space to be that vacuity where you can see the absence of something there. That is compounded space. There is this vacuity that you can see when there is nothing obstructing it. But if there is something that is obstructing it, you cannot see it. That vacuity that you can see is compounded space.

Uncompounded space is a phenomenon that does not arise from causes and conditions because it is permanent and permanent phenomena do not arise from causes and conditions. So what exactly is uncompounded space? It is that mere negation of obstructive contact.

- When we talk about compounded space, the space that we can see, that is impermanent.
- When we talk about uncompounded space, that is permanent.

Compounded space	Uncompounded space
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The vacuity that you can see from the absence of something there. • It is impermanent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mere negation of obstructive contact. • It is permanent as it does not arise from causes and conditions.

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