**Transcript of the teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on *The Eight Categories and Seventy Topics***

**Root Text:** *The Eight Categories and Seventy Topics* by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltsen, translated by Jampa Gendun. Final draft October 2002, updated May 2011. © Jampa Gendun & FPMT, Inc.

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Explaining permanence. Review of four correct abandonings. “Why do I need the Dharma?” Four legs of magical emanations. Two methods of developing calm abiding: (1) Five faults, eight antidotes. (2) Nine mental stages.

**EXPLAINING PERMANENCE**

*Student 1:* I would like to clarify whether the true cessation of suffering is an impermanent phenomenon or a permanent phenomenon. The reason I am asking this question is because on the one hand, the cessation of suffering is a product. It is the result of true paths that lead to the cessation of suffering.

*Khen Rinpoche: So your question is, “Are true cessations impermanent?”*

*Student 1:* On the other hand, when the cessation of suffering is achieved, it is forever. In that way, the true cessation of suffering is a permanent phenomenon. So when we look at these two different perspectives, how do we classify this cessation of suffering? Is it a product or is it a permanent phenomenon?

*Khen Rinpoche: I understand your question now.*

*Student 1*: I am also inclined to think that a mental image is impermanent. I find it difficult to accept that one will have a mental consciousness, an impermanent phenomenon that arises voluntarily while the mental image is a permanent phenomenon. I thought a mental image should be classified as a non-associated compositional factor. It is an appearing object to the mind.

We have also been told that the emptiness of inherent existence is a permanent phenomenon. The conventional nature and ultimate nature of phenomena are posited as one entity with different isolates. To me, these two isolates must exist in congruence with each other and not as complete opposites of each other, i.e., one isolate is a permanent phenomenon and the other isolate is an impermanent phenomenon.

Can Khen Rinpoche please explain the different interpretations of the word, ‘permanent’ in relation to a mental image, the cessation of suffering and the emptiness of inherent existence. My understanding of ‘permanent’ is that it is non-momentary and unchanging.

*Answer:* The main thing is that you have to think about what is discussed in the module on the tathagata essence and what was posited as the tathagata essence. There are two parts:

* There is the tathagata essence that is the factor of luminosity and awareness, which is the mind.
* The emptiness of true existence of that mind is also posited as the tathagata essence.

So the emptiness of true existence is posited as the tathagata essence but the basis of that emptiness, the factor of luminosity and awareness, which is the mind, is also the tathagata essence.

When the stains or defilements of the mind are removed through the force of the antidotes, the absence of the defilements is none other than the emptiness of the mind. The true cessations that are achieved through the force of the antidotes are not other than the emptiness of the mind. It is not as if when you have achieved true cessations, there is something that is not the emptiness of the mind. It is not like that.

The mind has always been empty of existing truly since beginningless lifetimes. For as long as the mind has been in existence, the final nature of the mind is its emptiness of true existence. It has always been like that, pure and undefiled. The emptiness of the mind is not created through causes and conditions. This is why the natural perfection of wisdom is posited as emptiness because for as long as emptiness existed, it has always been undefiled by the defilements.

The factor of clarity (or luminosity) and awareness is the mind. When the mind is separated from the defilements, that mind becomes the wisdom truth body. The emptiness of that wisdom truth body is the nature body.

When somebody achieves the path of seeing and the path of release of the path of seeing, that mind is separated from a particular defilement, the intellectually acquired or artificial conception of true existence. The cessation that is achieved is the abandonment of the artificial conception of true existence, which is the emptiness of that mind. It is just that at this point in time, the emptiness of the mind of this person who has achieved this abandonment is called a true cessation. Come the time when that person has abandoned the afflictive obscurations, the abandonment of those afflictive obscurations is still the suchness of that person’s mind. But at this juncture, it is given the name, ‘the abandonment that is the abandonment of the afflictive obscurations’.

Then comes the time when the mind is separated from every single obscuration, including the knowledge obscurations, the emptiness of that mind is called, ‘the abandonment that is the abandonment of the two obscurations’. But it is the same suchness of the mind. Because the mind has evolved, the suchness of that mind that has evolved is given a different name.

During this whole evolution process, the mind is evolving or changing. The suchness of the mind that is going through that process of evolution acquires different names. Different names are acquired because the mind has changed, not because the suchness of the mind has changed. The suchness of the mind *never* changes. As such, the suchness of the mind is an uncompounded phenomenon.

With regard to the meaning generality or mental image, it is a bit more difficult. When we talk about mental images, there is a factor that is specifically characterized and there is a factor that is a conceptual construct. However, for us, these two are mixed indistinguishably and it is difficult for us to see the difference between them.

The point is that the appearances that appear to a conceptual consciousness are not necessary conceptual as:

* there are appearances that are conceptual
* there are appearances that are non-conceptual

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**REVIEW OF FOUR CORRECT ABANDONINGS**

One of the reason for understanding the four close placements of mindfulness is that one comes to understand that:

* the thoroughly afflicted class of phenomena—true sufferings and true origins— are objects to be abandoned
* true paths and true cessations are objects to be cultivated

The main point is that one should understand that one has to have wisdom to understand what needs to be abandoned and what needs to be cultivated. On the basis of that, one develops an aspiration to actually abandon that which should be abandoned and cultivate that which should be cultivated.

What follows after the four close placements of mindfulness is the four correct abandonings, whose entity is joyous effort. It is an enthusiasm for abandoning the objects of abandonment and for adopting the antidotes that are the objects of cultivation.

There are non-virtues that have been generated. One has to abandon the non-virtues that one has already generated. To do that, the power of support and the power of eradication are very important.

In the previous lesson, I raised the qualm about the power of eradication, i.e., essentially regret. By generating regret alone, does that lead to the purification of the negativities that have already been accumulated? Yes or no?

I guess probably we have to say that if there is real, sincere and strong regret, it will lead to the reduction or purification of the non-virtue accumulated. Let’s say, a sincere apology after one has said something nasty or hurtful to another person. If one apologizes sincerely many times, it should work. Then both parties will forget about it.

In the event of the accumulation of non-virtue, if one cultivates the power of support, i.e., going for refuge and generating the mind of enlightenment and, in particular, generate strong regret, it should reduce or purify the non-virtues that have already been generated.

The first of the four abandonings is called the abandonment of the non-virtues that has already been generated. That abandonment does not refer to an action that has already ceased. It doesn’t mean, “The job is done. It has already been abandoned.” It is not to be seen as a past tense. Rather the word ‘abandonment’ is more like a verb that refers to a particular action that to be done in the future.

Next is the generation of non-virtues that has not been generated. It means not accumulating fresh negative karma or not engaging in new non-virtues, i.e., one does that by applying the power of restraint. If we are able to apply the power of refraining from doing that action again, it makes a big difference to not generating new non-virtues.

Then there is generating the virtues that have not been generated. With respect to the virtues that have already been generated, one should not have a sense of complacency. Rather, one should seek to increase the virtues that have already been generated.

Whether one is generating the virtues that have not been generated or increasing the virtues that have been generated, one needs effort to actively bring that about. One does so with enthusiasm. One should not be content with doing some small little thing, thinking, “This is enough merit!” Rather, one should seek to increase the virtues that have already been generated.

Among the four powers, the generation of the virtues that have not been generated and the increase of virtues that have been generated go with the power of the antidote. The power of applying the antidote (or the power of remedy) is the condition for the generation of virtues that have not been generated and increasing the virtues that have been generated. As mentioned in the lam-rim literature under the power of applying the antidote, six are mentioned:

1. reading or reciting the teachings of the Buddha
2. the recitation of dharanis and mantras
3. making offerings to the buddhas
4. reciting the names of the buddhas
5. erecting holy images
6. meditating on emptiness

It is said that the meditation on emptiness is the most powerful way of applying the remedy. But you have to understand why this is so. In the beginning of Chapter Nine, the wisdom chapter in *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds,* Shantideva said that all the teachings that preceded this chapter were taught by the Buddha for developing wisdom.[[1]](#footnote-2) Wisdom here refers to the wisdom realizing selflessness. So whether it is the recitation of sutras or mantras, making offerings and so forth, at the end of the day, they are preliminaries for leading sentient beings towards the development of the wisdom realizing selflessness.

While it is said that the root of our cyclic existence is the ignorance apprehending a self, we have to identify for ourselves what exactly this ignorance is. This apprehension of a self is said to be the root of all our problems and samsara. The only antidote to this ignorance apprehending a self is the wisdom realizing selflessness. This means that without this wisdom realizing selflessness, it doesn’t matter what you do, there is no way to defeat this ignorance that is the root of all our problems. So it is most vital to engage in hearing, reflecting and meditating in order to develop this wisdom realizing selflessness. At the same time, we have to accumulate a lot of merit to purify our mind of obscurations and negativities.

**“WHY DO I NEED THE DHARMA?”**

We all have to ask ourselves, “Why do I need the Dharma in the first place? What am I looking for?” You have to want the Dharma from the depths of your heart. For that to happen, you need to know why you need the Dharma.

You are all here to educate yourself about the Dharma. Do you ask yourself, “Why am I doing this? What am I looking for?” If you don’t see for yourself from the depths of your heart and you don’t really know why the Dharma is so important, why you really need the Dharma, then I think everything is going to be difficult.

At least, until you get some real feeling in your heart of how samsara and normal life are in the nature of suffering, then just learning about and studying the Dharma alone will not have much effect on the mind. It is important to have some sense of renunciation from your heart. You need to genuinely feel that normal life is suffering.

On top of that, you have to reach a point where you begin to see that the root of your problems is really your own ego, your ignorance. The only antidote is developing the wisdom realizing selflessness. It is only when you gain that understanding that you will be able to put up with the difficulties in your studies and practice. You will then be able to disregard any physical discomfort or challenges that may arise.

You have to reach that stage where you feel it in your heart. Only when you have become such a person, with this minimum level of experience, will you truly start to appreciate your own gurus. If you have become sick of samsara and you are looking for a way out, looking for the Dharma, especially looking for the wisdom realizing emptiness, then when you find someone who is qualified and who can help you to get what you want, definitely, you will appreciate that person so much. You will feel the kindness of that person. At that time, what is mentioned in the teachings—that the guru is kinder than the Buddha—makes sense to you.

Let’s say that you are dying of thirst. Then you meet someone who gives you a cup of water and saves you from death. Of course, you will be so appreciative of that person. You will regard that person to be so kind. But this is just for this one life alone.

For the person who feels that samsara is suffering and is really looking for a way out, when that person meets his qualified guru who can help him and gives him what he wants, i.e., freeing him from samsara forever, that guru’s kindness is beyond compare. An individual who sees all these points, obviously, he can feel the kindness of the guru. Because he sees how the guru can benefit him in all his lifetimes up to enlightenment, it is not difficult for this person anymore to sacrifice for the guru and give up his body, possessions and so forth.

I think we have too much learning here but not enough practice. We have too much talking and learning. Of course, in one way, we are planting imprints. But no matter what imprints are planted, the mind doesn’t change at all from just learning the Dharma. So I think there is too much talking and too much learning. I think it is difficult for us to have that intense interest, of dying to practise the Dharma. We don’t have that kind of interest.

We have been talking about the four correct abandonings. They refer to joyous effort. You cannot have effort without heartfelt enthusiasm where you really want to abandon the objects of abandonments and adopt the antidotes to cultivate the practice.

**FOUR LEGS OF MAGICAL EMANATION**

The set of the four legs of magical emanation are essentially meditative stabilizations.

What is posited as the object of observation of the four legs of magical emanation? Literally, it is a magical emanation as it is able to cause one thing to become many and causing many things to become one. As mentioned here in the text, the way to achieve calm abiding is the cultivation of concentration.

*Five faults, eight antidotes*

In Maitreya’s *Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes*, there is an explanation of how one can develop calm abiding by cultivating the eight antidotes that counteracts the five faults.

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| **Fault** | **Antidote** |
| 1. Laziness | 1. Faith 2. Aspiration 3. Effort 4. Pliancy |
| 2. Forgetfulness | 5. Mindfulness |
| 3. Laxity and excitement | 6. Introspection |
| 4. Non-application | 7. Intention |
| 5. Over-application | 8. Equanimity |

Of the eight antidotes, the first four are the antidotes to the fault of laziness:

1. faith
2. aspiration
3. effort
4. pliancy

* The aspiration to achieve calm abiding is important before one can have any hope of achieving it.
* But before you can yearn for calm abiding, you first must have faith as faith is the root of aspiration. You need the faith of conviction, “This is absolutely necessary and beneficial. I definitely need this.” It is from this faith of conviction that one generates aspiration or a strong yearning.
* If there is such strong yearning, naturally, one would put in the effort and joyously persevere in order to achieve the goal.
* By applying the correct effort, when one achieves the physical and mental pliancies, one will not be overcome by physical and mental challenges.

1. During the actual process of cultivating concentration, in the beginning, it is extremely important to not forget the object of observation because forgetting the object of observation is a big fault. The remedy to that is mindfulness, i.e., not forgetting.
2. On the basis of not forgetting the chosen object of observation, one enters into the cultivation of concentration. But during that process, many challenges and obstacles will arise, such as laxity or mental excitement. In order to recognize their arising, you need introspection or vigilance. This is also a wisdom. It is introspection that detects the arising of the faults of laxity and excitement.
3. But just detecting their arising is not sufficient. What do you do after you have detected that laxity and excitement are about to arise? You are supposed to immediately apply whatever antidotes that are appropriate to the fault that is arising. So not applying the antidote when laxity and excitement are arising is a fault.
4. When laxity and excitement are not arising, i.e., when the mind is in a peaceful, calm and undisturbed state, if one were to apply an antidote at that time, that is also a fault. It is the fault of over-application. One should not apply any antidote when there is no laxity or excitement arising. Rather, one has to leave the mind in a state of equanimity.

We have studied this before. I thought to go through it briefly. Hopefully, it can serve as a reminder of what you have learnt.

*Nine mental stages*

The other method for cultivating calm abiding is through the nine mental stages as explained in Maitreya’s *Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras*.

*~ 1. Placement*

The first mental stage is called placement. In the beginning, you have to decide on your object of observation, i.e., the object that you are going to focus your mind on. Once you have chosen your object of observation, you have to stick to that object. You cannot change the object according to your whim and fancy.

On the first stage of mental placement, you fix your mind on the chosen object of observation. At this first stage, probably you are not able to stay on the object for even more than a minute or two as the mind is so distracted.

*~ 2. Continuous placement*

After you have placed your mind on the chosen object of observation, the idea is to extend your ability to stay on that object for a longer and longer period of time, say, at least five to ten minutes instead of just a minute or so.

This is where you have the second stage called continuous placement. At this stage of the development of the mind, one is probably still very distracted. The idea is to bring the mind back to the chosen object of observation and try to develop the ability to stay on the object for a longer period of time. If you want to develop your mind and meditate, then you have to put in the time and effort.

*~ 3. Patchy placement*

The third mental stage is patchy placement. When one is at this stage, one has achieved some ability to abide on the object. There is some stability with regard to the mind’s ability to abide on the chosen object of meditation. Nevertheless, the mind can still be distracted. When the mind is distracted, through the application of mindfulness and introspection, one brings the mind’s attention back onto the chosen object of meditation. At this third mental stage, one has a fairly good idea of both the coarse and subtle forms of laxity.

*~ 4. Close placement*

On the fourth mental stage called close placement, one improves on what has been achieved in the third mental stage, i.e., one improves one’s ability with the application of mindfulness and introspection. At this stage of close placement, one’s ability to stay on the object of observation is quite stable and there is good clarity with regard to the object of observation.

*~ 5. Taming*

On the fifth mental stage called taming, one’s ability is stay on the object is stable and good. The object of observation appears clearly in the mind but the mind’s grip on the chosen object of observation is somewhat loose. This is because there is still subtle laxity at this stage.

Lama Tsongkhapa said in his *Lamrim Chen* that there were some Tibetan masters of the past who said that when one reaches this level, this is good meditation because one has the factors of clarity and stability and one’s mind is very relaxed. Because of this, these Tibetan masters said that this is a good meditation as you can see the object clearly, your mind is not distracted, yet you are also relaxed. Lama Tsongkhapa refuted this and said this is not a good meditation at all!

I guess we may have similar experiences even when we are not at the fifth stage. Sometimes when we meditate, our mind is able to stay on the object, the mind is not disturbed and there is some clarity of the object. Yet, at the same time, we do feel very relaxed. We may feel so relaxed that we fall asleep after a while! The point is that even if we feel very relaxed in our meditation, if that leads to our falling asleep, that is not a good meditation at all.

*Khen Rinpoche: Do you know why it is not a good meditation if you were to fall asleep?*

The main point is that your mind is becoming less and less clear and duller and duller. You finally fall asleep, which in itself is classified as a derivative of ignorance. That being the case, the meditation cannot be a good meditation. It is a bad meditation because it is making your mind less clear and duller. How can it be a good meditation? It is making your mind worse, not making it better.

We have looked at all this before in the lam-rim module. You already know this, assuming you have not forgotten it. If you have forgotten it, this means that you did not understand it in the first place. There is no such thing as knowing and ascertaining something and then forgetting it. If you really understood it, you won’t forget about it. Here I am saying that understanding something and forgetting something are mutually exclusive.

This is why Je Rinpoche Lama Tsongkhapa said that a meditation that makes your mind less and less clear and duller and duller, finally even causing you to fall sleep is not a good meditation at all. It is a really bad meditation.

A good meditation that helps your mind to develop must not only have the factors of clarity and stability—being able to stay on the object without being distracted—but the manner in which the mind holds on to the object must be fairly firm. The mind is very alert and has the strength and energy to have a good hold of the object. If these characteristics are present, then the meditation will make your mind better and better.

Therefore at this mental stage, because of the great danger of being overcome by laxity, the meditator has to do something to counteract the arising of laxity. The meditator has to uplift the mind by, say, thinking about the great benefits of having concentration and so forth. In this way, the meditator boosts his mental energy such that there are the factors of stability, clarity and energy in the manner the mind is holding on to the chosen object of meditation.

*~ 6. Pacification*

On the sixth mental stage called pacification, there is probably no longer any danger of being overcome by laxity. However, because of having uplifted the mind earlier on, there could be instances whereby the mind comes under the influence of excitement and distraction because of overly uplifting the mind.

Introspection is extremely important on the fifth and sixth mental stags. On the sixth mental stage, because there is still the danger of the mind being distracted due to the influence of being overly uplifted, one has to be alert to the arising of excitement and distraction with strong introspection. One counteracts that by thinking about the faults of distraction.

*~ 7. Complete pacification*

The seventh stage is called complete or thorough pacification. At this stage, there is still the possibility of the arising of subtle excitement. But even if it does arise, one is able to overcome it easily without much effort.

*~ 8. Single-pointed attention*

The eighth mental stage is called single-pointed attention. On this stage, I guess there is no danger of either excitement or laxity arising. The meditator is able to stay on the chosen object for a long time. Even if we were to allow for the arising of excitement or laxity at this level, it will be quickly pacified through strong mindfulness and introspection on the part of the meditator.

*~ 9. Even placement*

The ninth stage is called even or balanced placement. At this stage, the meditator only needs to put in a little effort to enter a state of concentration where he is able to remain on the object for a long time naturally and spontaneously.

There will then come a time when the meditator achieves mental pliancy followed by physical pliancy. Following the achievement of physical pliancy, the meditator experiences the bliss of physical pliancy followed by the bliss of mental pliancy. It is said that when the bliss of these pliancies are achieved, this marks the attainment of calm abiding.

* I guess mental pliancy is when the mind becomes serviceable.
* Due to that serviceability, one achieves the serviceability of the winds in the body. That is physical pliancy. So, first there is mental pliancy followed by physical pliancy. Achieving the serviceability of the body, physical pliancy, is due to the smooth movement of the winds in the body.
* After the achievement of physical pliancy comes the bliss of physical pliancy.
* This is then followed by the bliss of mental pliancy.

When all these are achieved, because of the serviceability of the body and mind, laziness is overcome and the meditator no longer feels tired, lazy or bored. That person will have no difficulty engaging in virtue. When he is engaging in virtue, the mind is so enthusiastic and happy. When he is engaging in virtue with his body, say, making prostrations, the meditator is full of energy unlike us when we are making prostrations.

*Khen Rinpoche*: *If we are like that, how are we to achieve enlightenment? I don’t know.*

With some understanding of this presentation, it will help us to see how important it is to realise calm abiding. In a way, it also shows us that our contaminated appropriated aggregates can be transformed. With the attainment of calm abiding, without even talking about enlightenment, there will be a huge transformation that happens to not just the mind but also the body.

Calm abiding is the basis for the four legs of magical emanation. To be able to perform all these magical emanations, you need perfect concentration and calm abiding.

It is said that bodhisattvas who have these legs of magical emanation can travel to the pure lands to receive teachings.

Then on the great path of accumulation, one achieves the concentration called the stream of Dharma or stream of doctrine whereby the bodhisattva is able to see the supreme emanation bodies directly and receive teachings from them. All this happens on the basis of the attainment of calm abiding, so calm abiding is really important.

Interpreted by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme; transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Patricia Lee and Julia Koh; edited by Cecilia Tsong.

1. “The Muni taught all these branches/ For the purpose of wisdom./ Therefore, those who wish to pacify suffering/ Should generate wisdom.” Verse 1, Chapter 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)