**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.

**Lesson 27 22 September 2016**

Review: Five powers and five strengths. The seven branches of enlightenment. Path of seeing abandonments. The 112 path of seeing abandonments that are afflictive obscurations. The 108 path of seeing abandonments that are knowledge obscurations.

*Khen Rinpoche*: *When we are reciting the Heart Sutra, in the next class, I want somebody to use the mike to recite it and for us to chant it together loudly. When we chant together, there is some kind of energy there. I didn’t say anything so far. It doesn’t sound so nice when we chant it as if it is boring to chant together. So next time, I will appoint one of you to use the mike.*

*Actually, at one time, Rinpoche recommended that we chant the very slow version of the Heart Sutra. We are not going to do that but at least, we should chant with some group energy.*

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*Question:* This topic of the 37 harmonies of enlightenment is in the category for the path common with the hearers’ path. I’m trying to reconcile that it is the path common with the hearers’ path and what we have discussed so far in the context of the Mahayana paths and grounds. Are they mutually inclusive? If it is the path common with the hearers’ path, then the hearers do not have the Mahayana in their continua.

*Khen Rinpoche*: In general, the 37 harmonies of enlightenment are common to the Hinayana. When we say it is common, it means that they are the objects to be meditated on by both the Hinayanists and Mahayanists.

If we were to ask: Do the Hinayanists meditate on the 37 harmonies of enlightenment such as the four close placements of mindfulness, the four correct abandonings, the four legs of magical emanations, the five powers, the five strengths, the seven branches of enlightenment and the eight-fold path of the superiors? We have to say, “Yes, they do.”

The reason why these 37 harmonies of enlightenment are explained here from the Mahayana perspective is that this explanation is part of Chapter Four of the *Ornament for Clear Realization.* The intended target audience of this text are those of the Mahayana lineage.

**REVIEW: FIVE POWERS AND FIVE STRENGTHS**

The five powers are:

1. the power of faith
2. the power of joyous effort
3. the power of mindfulness
4. the power of meditative stabilization
5. the power of wisdom

These are meditated on primarily at the heat and peak levels of the path of preparation.

The heat level of the path of preparation is so called because just as heat is a sign that a fire will soon flare up, likewise, the heat level of the path of preparation is a sign indicating that the bodhisattva will achieve the non-conceptual wisdom, the meditative equipoise of the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing.

The five powers are so called because from the heat level of the path of preparation onwards, they are essentially knowers that are self-powered with respect to generating the arya path, which is its result.

It is said that those who have achieved the heat level of the path of preparation will never be born in any inopportune states. This means that whatever rebirth they get will necessarily be endowed with the freedoms and endowments.

The peak level of the path of preparation is so called because they have reached the peak, i.e., the highest point, where their roots of virtue can never be destroyed.

It is said that on the heat and peak levels of the path of preparation, the discordant factors—the opposites of the five powers, such as laziness, non-faith, distraction, forgetfulness and corrupted wisdom—can arise. We have discussed in the last lesson whether the discordant factors can arise during meditative equipoise.

When one enters the heat level of the path of preparation, let’s say, when one is in meditative equipoise, is it possible for the discordant factors such as non-faith to arise or manifest? As for the post-meditative equipoise, that is straightforward. It is quite clear that definitely it is possible for them to arise at that time. However, during meditative equipoise, is it possible for these discordant factors to manifest? That was the question.

It is said that on the heat and peak levels of the path of preparation in the meditative equipoise focussing on emptiness, there is the dualistic appearance of the subject (the wisdom meditating on emptiness) and the object (emptiness) meditated on. There is a sense of duality as these two appear separate. The bodhisattva is aware of this. It is clearly stated in Gyaltsab Je’s *Ornament of Essential Explanation* that there is dualistic appearance.

In meditative equipoise on the heat or peak levels of the path of preparation, which is essentially a special insight and calm abiding focussing on emptiness, do the discordant factors like non faith and laziness arise or not?

It is clear in the text that it is possible for the discordant factors to manifest during post-meditative equipoise but nothing much is said about during meditative equipoise. Of course, it is easier to say that they don’t arise or manifest in meditative equipoise.

When the five powers—the power of faith, joyous effort, mindfulness, meditative stabilization and wisdom—grow and increase in strength, once one reaches the forbearance level and the supreme mundane qualities level of the path of preparation, the five powers are no longer called the five powers. Rather, they are called the five strengths or the five forces. They are essentially the same thing. It is just that they are stronger versions of the five powers.

Prior to the forbearance level of the path of preparation, the bodhisattva will not be reborn in the lower realms. It is said that on the forbearance level of the path of preparation, the bodhisattva gains the confidence that he will not be reborn in the lower realms.

The supreme mundane qualities level of the path of preparation is so called because it is like the highest level that one can reach as an ordinary being.

On the forbearance and the supreme mundane qualities levels of the path of preparation, the discordant factors such as non-faith, laziness and so forth, will not arise and manifest even in post-meditative equipoise.

On the forbearance level of the path of preparation, there is some subsidence of dualistic appearance in meditative equipoise. There isn’t the appearance of duality— the distance between the person meditating on the subject and the object that is being meditated upon. Also, the meditator probably does not have a sense of himself as a meditator. That subject diminishes. So this is an achievement that is more exalted than the peak level of the path of preparation.

Because these five—faith, joyous effort, mindfulness, meditative stabilization and wisdom—are so powerful on the forbearance and the supreme mundane qualities levels of the path of preparation, the five discordant factors cannot manifest and arise. As such, on the forbearance level and the supreme mundane qualities level of the path of preparation, they are called the five strengths or five forces.

**SEVEN BRANCHES OF ENLIGHTENMENT**

The seven branches of enlightenment tie in with the path of seeing.   
According to the *Compendium of Knowledge*, the four noble truths are posited to be the objects of observation of the seven branches of enlightenment.

The first branch, the branch of enlightenment of perfect mindfulness, has the four noble truths as the objects of observation.

1. By focussing on true sufferings, one comes to know suffering.
2. By focussing on true origins, one comes to develop a desire to be separated from true origins.
3. By focussing on true cessations, one understands that they are to be actualized. Perfect mindfulness here causes one to focus on that and not to be distracted and forget that.
4. By focussing on true paths, one comes to understand that that is something to be meditated upon.

Likewise, the rest of the branches are explained in terms of a similar manner of meditation to the first branch.

The purpose of meditating on the five powers and the five strengths is to quickly generate and achieve the arya paths. In this case, one enters the path of seeing.

Even upon achieving the path of seeing, the arya path, the objects of observation for the bodhisattva superiors are still the four noble truths. Why? In this case, on the path of seeing, they meditate on the four noble truths to abandon the path of seeing abandonments.

*Path of seeing abandonments*

Let’s look at the path of seeing abandonments. In this context, we have to talk about them from the viewpoint of the Autonomy Middle Way School (AMWS). According to the AMWS, there are:

* the 112 path of seeing abandonments that are afflictive obscurations
* the 108 path of seeing abandonments that are knowledge obscurations

*~ 112 path of seeing abandonments that are afflictive obscurations*

Why are there 112 path of seeing abandonments that are afflictive obscurations? This is because 40 belong to the desire realm and 72 belong to the two higher realms.

Why are there 40 path of seeing abandonments that belong to the desire realm? Because there are ten afflictions related to each of the four noble truths. Therefore, altogether there are 40 path of seeing abandonments that are the afflictive obscurations of the desire realm.

What are the ten? There are five non-views and the five views. The five non-views are:

1. attachment
2. anger
3. pride
4. afflicted ignorance
5. afflicted doubt

The five views are:

1. the view of the transitory collections
2. the view holding on to an extreme
3. the conception of bad views as supreme
4. the view holding bad ethics and modes of conduct as supreme
5. wrong views

There are 72 path of seeing abandonments related to the two higher realms—the form realm and the formless realm with 36 abandonments of the form realm and 36 abandonments of the formless realm.

Why are there only 36 abandonments in the form realm and 36 in the formless realm whereas there are 40 abandonments in the desire realm? If you exclude the truth of suffering that is anger and so forth, minus four, then there are 36 abandonments of the form realm and 36 of the formless realm. The point is that there is no anger in the form and formless realms.

*Khen Rinpoche: Anger only arises in the desire realm.*

*~ 108 path of seeing abandonments that are knowledge obscurations*

Then there are the 108 path of seeing abandonments that are knowledge obscurations. There are 36 of these in the desire realm, 36 in the form realm and 36 in the formless realm.

The 36 of the desire realm are:

* the nine conceptions of the apprehended of thoroughly afflicted phenomena
* the nine conceptions of the apprehended of completely pure phenomena
* the nine conceptions of the apprehenders of substantial existents
* the nine conceptions of the apprehenders of imputed existents

According to the AMWS, in brief, these are the path of seeing abandonments. According to this school, there is a relationship between the path of seeing abandonments that are afflictive obscurations and the four noble truths.

This is just a list. If we go into details, it gets complicated.

There are the four truths—true sufferings that are path of seeing abandonments, the true origins that are path of seeing abandonments and so forth.

What about true cessations? What are their objects of observation? What do they focus on?

What about the true paths that are the path of seeing abandonments? What are their objects of observation?

One meditates on the seven branches of enlightenment in order to abandon:

* the path of seeing abandonments that are the afflictive obscurations
* the path of seeing abandonments that are the knowledge obscurations

By meditating on the seven branches of enlightenment, they are basically the antidotes to the path of seeing abandonments that are the afflictive obscurations and the path of seeing abandonments that are the knowledge obscurations. Through that, one moves towards enlightenment.

Why are they called the seven branches of enlightenment? Because enlightenment here is the great enlightenment, i.e., full enlightenment. The branches here are understood to be the causes that precedes and leads to enlightenment. As such, they are called the branches of enlightenment.

When divided, the seven branches of enlightenment on the path of seeing are:

1. the branch of enlightenment of perfect mindfulness
2. the branch of enlightenment of perfect fine discernment of phenomena
3. the branch of enlightenment of perfect joyous effort
4. the branch of enlightenment of perfect joy
5. the branch of enlightenment of perfect pliancy
6. the branch of enlightenment of perfect meditative stabilization
7. the branch of enlightenment of perfect equanimity

Perfect mindfulness, perfect fine discernment of phenomena, perfect joyous effort and perfect meditative stabilization are pretty straightforward. I think pliancy in this context here refers mainly to mental pliancy. As for the branch of enlightenment of perfect equanimity, I think the equanimity here is one of the eight antidotes to the five faults. The last antidote, equanimity, is desisting from applying antidotes when the mind is not influenced by laxity or excitement while cultivating calm abiding.

In cultivating calm abiding, there are the five faults that are to be overcome by the eight antidotes. The seventh and eighth antidotes are intention and equanimity respectively. With mindfulness and introspection, when the meditator spots the arising of laxity and excitement, he must strive in applying the antidotes to counteract them. But when the mind is not influenced by laxity and excitement, the meditator should leave the mind in equanimity, i.e., he should desist from cultivating any antidote at all. I think equanimity here is also the mental factor of equanimity that is included in the 11 virtuous mental factors.

If we discuss the cultivation of calm abiding according to the nine mental stages, I think real equanimity only comes on the ninth stage. It was explained that on the sixth mental stage, laxity and excitement will be pacified. On the seventh and eighth stages, it is extremely unlikely that laxity and excitement will arise. Even if they do arise, the meditator will be able to counteract them with just a little bit of effort. He can sense the arising of laxity and excitement. All the meditator has to do is to apply the mind with just a little bit of effort and again, they are pacified.

It is said that on the ninth mental stage, the meditator is able to enter a concentrated state with ease. Once he is in that state, he is able to abide in it easily without much effort. There will not be any occurrence of laxity and excitement. Therefore, I think, I am not sure, it is on the ninth mental stage that a fully qualified equanimity will arise. On the ninth mental stage, with equanimity, the mind becomes serviceable. When the mind become serviceable, the person then goes on first, to achieve mental pliancy followed by physical pliancy.

There is a close relationship between the mind and the subtle energy, the winds. When the mind becomes serviceable or pliant, it brings a sense of peace. Because of that strong connection between the mind and the body—in this case, the subtle energy that carries the winds—the body also becomes very blissful as it achieves physical pliancy.

In short, the mind becomes serviceable. Then it achieves mental pliancy and physical pliancy. Because of the physical pliancy due to the winds, it becomes serviceable. The meditator then experiences the bliss of physical pliancy followed by the bliss of mental pliancy. When that happens, one is said to have achieved calm abiding. That is the measure.

Calm abiding is not achieved just because one reaches the ninth stage. Calm abiding happens *after* one reaches the ninth stage. From the ninth mental stage, one goes on to achieve mental pliancy, followed by physical pliancy, followed by the bliss of physical pliancy and then the bliss of mental pliancy. Only then is that person said to have achieved calm abiding.

Mental pliancy 🡪 physical pliancy 🡪 bliss of physical pliancy, 🡪bliss of mental pliancy.

It is said that the seven branches of enlightenment can be subsumed into five branches.

1. *The branch of abiding*

The branch of enlightenment of perfect mindfulness comes under the branch of abiding. Mindfulness is subsumed under the branch of abiding. The function of mindfulness is that one will not be distracted from the objects of observation. The mind is supposed to be abiding on the objects of observation. Since mindfulness is critical for that, therefore, it comes under the branch of abiding.

1. *The branch of nature*

The branch of enlightenment of perfect fine discernment of phenomena is subsumed under the branch of nature. Since the branch of enlightenment of perfect fine discernment of phenomena is the main cause of enlightenment, as such, it comes under the branch of nature. It is like the nature of enlightenment. It is the main cause of enlightenment.

1. *The branch of definite emergence*

The branch of enlightenment of perfect joyous effort is the branch of definite emergence. There are a few explanations as to how the branch of enlightenment of perfect joyous effort is the branch of definite emergence. One of the explanations is this: It is a branch whereby one comes to be free from being an ordinary person, i.e., one definitely emerges from being an ordinary person. That is due to joyous effort.

1. *The branch of benefit*

Since the branch of perfect joy benefits the body and mind, it is also called the branch of benefit.

1. *The branch that is without afflictions*

The branches of enlightenment of perfect pliancy, perfect meditative stabilization and perfect equanimity are subsumed under the branch that is without afflictions.

The reason why the branches of enlightenment of perfect pliancy, perfect meditative stabilization and perfect equanimity are subsumed under the branch that is without afflictions is that when one generates equanimity, let’s say, on the ninth mental stage where there is an absence of laxity and excitement, the afflictions would not manifest. Likewise, with concentration and pliancy, the afflictions will not manifest. As such, these three branches are subsumed under the branch that is without afflictions.

If you look at the five powers or five strengths, you have faith, joyous effort, mindfulness, meditative stabilization and wisdom. In the seven branches of enlightenment, faith is not there while the rest of the five powers or five strengths are among the seven branches of enlightenment.

What has happened to faith? Why is it excluded? When the power of faith or the strength of faith is generated, its opposite, non-faith, is suppressed to the extent that it cannot manifest. I think non-faith is eradicated on the path of seeing.

In particular, the example of non-faith in the Three Jewels is given. From the path of seeing onwards, it is impossible for non-faith in the Three Jewels to arise. On the path of seeing, the individual develops a very special kind of faith in the Three Jewels and in the workings of cause and effect.

Due to seeing the truth, i.e., emptiness, directly on the path of seeing, that induces a very special kind of strong faith in the Three Jewels. That individual becomes a Sangha Jewel himself and starts to be a real object of refuge for others.

According to this system, it is only when the path of seeing is attained that one has in one’s hand the direct antidote to the path of seeing abandonments that are afflictive obscurations and the path of seeing abandonments that are knowledge obscurations.

When one enters the path of seeing, from the uninterrupted path onwards, one comes to possess the Dharma Jewel because one has actualized the Dharma Jewel. Because of having the Dharma Jewel in one’s continuum, one is considered a Sangha Jewel.

You should be familiar with the evolution of the refuge jewels because we have talked about them before. Because of possessing the Dharma Jewel in one’s mental continuum, then one is a Sangha Jewel. Whether one is a Sangha Jewel depends on whether one possesses the Dharma Jewel. Likewise, whether one is a Buddha Jewel also depends on whether one possesses the Dharma Jewel. This is why among the three objects of refuge, the Dharma Jewel is said to be the actual refuge.

Anyway, this thought came to me. Why is it that among the five powers and the five strengths, faith is mentioned but it is not mentioned in the seven branches of enlightenment? So I just thought to mention to you that thought and my observation and views on it.

What is left is the seventh group, the eightfold path of the superiors. I think we will finish that in two sessions.

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*Khen Rinpoche: Do you have any questions? You ask. I stop here. From my side, I have finished talking. Now from your side, you talk.*

*Student 1:* When Khen Rinpoche was asking why faith is not included in the seven branches of enlightenment, I thought that perhaps, it wasn’t explicitly mentioned but it is implicit.

When you were explaining the five powers and five strengths and how faith was included among them, I wondered why faith was being highlighted on the path of preparation. Because I can’t imagine working to enter the path which is so tremendously difficult without faith in the first place. I can’t imagine even working through the path of accumulation without strong faith.

*Khen Rinpoche*: *I didn’t get your question exactly. What are you asking? Make your point short.*

*Student 1*: The five powers and the five forces occur on the path of preparation. One of them refers to faith. My question is why is it being highlighted at the path of preparation because to my mind, I can’t imagine not having faith right from the start even before entering the path. Without faith in the path, why would you want to work to enter the path?

*Khen Rinpoche: Finally, I got what you are asking.*

Actually, there is no need to talk about the importance of faith. Faith is really important. Whether it is prior to entering the path or when one is on the path, faith is important at every stage.

In the context of cultivating calm abiding, the very first antidote is faith. One needs strong faith in the benefits of calm abiding before one can have a chance of wanting to develop calm abiding.

* If you remember, the four close placements of mindfulness are primarily explained in relation to the small path of accumulation.
* Then the four correct abandonings are primarily explained in relation to the medium path of accumulation.
* The four legs of magical emanations are primarily explained in relation to the great path of accumulation.

This is not to say that therefore, they cannot exist prior to entering the path or they cannot exist outside of these paths.

In order to be a power, the knower must have the potential to produce an arya path. It must be self-powered with respect to generating its result, an arya path. A strength is so-called because it has the strength to quell the discordant classes.

The power of faith does not exist prior to that being a power. Of course, faith exists prior to that but it is not necessarily the power of faith because in order to become the power of faith, it must be self-powered with respect to generating the result, the arya path.

The path of accumulation is explained to be the time when the individual is accumulating the collections. On the path of accumulation, the accumulation of the collections is done primarily through hearing and reflection. Just as there is the wisdom arisen from hearing and the wisdom arisen from reflection, there is also the faith that arises from hearing and the faith that arises from reflection.

On the path of preparation, whatever wisdom is generated arises from meditation. Likewise, the faith is also the faith that arises from meditation. So, obviously it has to be a stronger faith than the faith arising from hearing and reflection.

The five powers and the five strengths also relate to having very strong concentration. Although the faith on the heat and peak levels of the path of preparation is strong faith, nevertheless, it is said that it is still possible for non-faith to manifest despite one having the power of faith.

Through the force of meditation, when the bodhisattva reaches the forbearance level and the supreme mundane quality level of the path of preparation, his strength of faith enables him to quell the manifestation of non-faith even in post-meditative equipoise. When he reaches the path of seeing, as I have mentioned, the faith of that bodhisattva is very different and special.

*Student 1:* Can you give an example of what kind of non-faith can arise?

*Khen Rinpoche*: Let’s say on the heat level of the path of preparation. The bodhisattva has the union of calm abiding and special insight focussing on emptiness, investigating the nature of the body and the aggregates. In meditative equipoise, he realises that they are empty. But when he gets up from the meditation, in post- meditative equipoise, it is possible for that bodhisattva to doubt and maybe experience a lack or absence of conviction in the emptiness of the body and aggregates.

On the heat and peak levels of the path of preparation, while in meditative equipoise, there is coarse dualistic appearance. The bodhisattva is aware of this. As such, I think because of that, in post-meditative equipoise, it is possible for the bodhisattva to have this lack of conviction and lack of belief.

In post-meditative equipoise, does this bodhisattva experience the appearance of true existence? Yes. He has not even started abandoning it so he still has the apprehension of true existence. Of course, everything appears to be truly existent. As such, it is possible for him to wonder, “Are things really empty?”

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