

**Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on the
Heart Sutra and the Six Perfections****Lesson 1****25th June 2013**

Presentation of the Mahayana paths and grounds according to the Consequence Middle Way School.
Paths of the ordinary bodhisattva: path of accumulation and path of preparation.

Khen Rinpoche: You have completed the exams. There were many questions so if you really want to know the answers, discuss them with each other. Find out why you were wrong, why you were right. Find out from each other. If you still cannot understand why you were wrong, then you can ask me, all right?

This time round, nobody got 100 marks (laughter). Many people said it was difficult. As I mentioned to everyone before, the exam was just for exercising your brain. When you exercise your brain, your brain becomes younger and healthier! That was the idea. .

Don't be too stressed over the exam. You got the right answer? That is alright. You got the wrong answer? That is also alright. It is not so much about the marks. Maybe some people are worried. They expected 100 marks and they didn't get it so they are upset. It is not like that.

Take it as an exercise and part of learning. Whether you get good marks or bad marks, it doesn't matter. Sometimes there may be some mistakes in giving out the marks. There may be a difference of one or two marks. There should be no argument about that. The marks do not go anywhere so just accept the marks given.

After class today, I will give back the exam paper. If someone felt there was such a difficult question—"Why is Khen Rinpoche asking me this?"—and you want to ask me, ask now. Just one question.

(No response from students).

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Before we start on *The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, I will talk a little about the paths and grounds. Ideally in order to learn and to really understand *The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, one must have a prior knowledge and understanding of the mode of progression along the paths according to the Consequence Middle Way School (CMWS). We must have a clear understanding of the presentation of the coarse and subtle selflessnesses according to the CMWS. You should re-visit what we had covered recently in the previous module; in particular, the section on the CMWS's presentation of:

- the main objects of abandonment
- the afflictive obscurations and the knowledge obscurations
- the illustrations that are posited for these two obscurations

If you remember from our previous discussion on the CMWS, with regard to the hearers, solitary realisers and the bodhisattvas, there is no difference with respect to their main objects of meditation. However there are differences in their main objects of abandonment.

You must have some understanding of these things in order to appreciate the explanation of *The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*. At the very end of the root text on tenets, in the section on the CMWS, there was a brief mention of how:

- the abandonment of the afflictive obscurations is simultaneous with the attainment of the eighth bodhisattva ground (or eighth bhumi) and,
- the abandonment of the knowledge obscurations is simultaneous with the actualisation of the four bodies of a buddha (page 27<sup>1</sup> of the root text).

In order to understand the meaning of these statements, we are going to look now at the presentation of the paths and grounds according to the CMWS.

Many of you may know that in *The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, there is this mantra: TADYATHA GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SVAHA. This mantra and the main subject matter of *The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* show how the bodhisattvas, on the basis of realising emptiness, progress on the Mahayana paths in order to achieve full enlightenment.

*Khen Rinpoche: That completes the Heart Sutra. Express version in ten minutes!*

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I will attempt to give a brief explanation of the paths and grounds according to this chart on the five Mahayana paths.²

All the four Buddhist tenets assert the three vehicles: the Hearers' Vehicle, the Solitary Realisers' Vehicle and the Bodhisattva Vehicle (or the Great Vehicle, the Mahayana). All three vehicles talk about the five paths. There are the five paths of the hearers, the five paths of the solitary realisers and the five paths of the bodhisattvas. The five paths for all three vehicles have the same name. The five paths are:

1. The path of accumulation
2. The path of preparation
3. The path of seeing
4. The path of meditation
5. The path of no more learning

For those of you who are seriously interested to learn, gain knowledge and understanding over time, then it is your personal responsibility to memorise some of these things. You should be able, at least, to say what the five paths are. This is your working capital. When you are unable even to express verbally what these five paths are, there is really no way to progress and to learn.

¹ *Presentation of Tenets* by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltzen can be downloaded from: http://www.fpmtabc.org/teachings_files/bp2ndM3.php.

² Refer to chart on *The Five Mahayana Paths* that can be downloaded from <http://www.fpmtabc.org/download/teaching/geshe-chonyi/bp/heartsutra/Handout/>.

MAHAYANA & HINAYANA TENETS & THE THREE VEHICLES

From the perspective of sutra

If you remember our discussion of the four Buddhist tenets, the first two Buddhist tenets are Hinayana tenets.³ They assert that when the hearers and solitary realisers complete their respective five paths, they become hearer arhats (or hearer foe destroyers) and solitary realiser arhats (or solitary realiser foe destroyers). They first achieve the nirvana with remainder. When they pass away, they achieve the nirvana without remainder. According to these two Hinayana tenets, when these arhats achieve the nirvana without remainder, their mental continua are severed.

What about those who become buddhas? According to the two Hinayana tenets, when a buddha passes away and achieves the nirvana without remainder, his mental continuum is also severed. That is the view of the two Hinayana tenets.

When you look at the Hinayana tenets, they do not assert that a buddha continues on in some form after passing away in order to benefit sentient beings. According to these Hinayana tenets, once a buddha passes into the sorrowless state and achieves the nirvana without remainder, his mental continuum is severed and nothing remains of him that works for the welfare of sentient beings. A buddha literally disappears into nothingness so the Hinayana tenets do not have a presentation or an explanation of a buddha benefiting sentient beings in myriad ways. When you think about it, this is something that is quite difficult to accept.

Khen Rinpoche: I am just repeating the tenets here. You should already know this. You know what I am talking about, don't you? If you do not know what I am talking about, then we are just leaving some imprints here.

Of the four Buddhist tenets, two are Hinayana tenets and two are Mahayana tenets. The two Mahayana tenets are the Mind Only School (MOS) and the Middle Way School (MWS).

There are different divisions within the MOS:

- There are some Proponents of Mind Only who assert that there are three final vehicles.
- There are some Proponents of Mind Only who assert that there is just one final vehicle.

In general, there are three vehicles. However some of the Proponents of Mind Only assert that, although there are three vehicles, in actuality, there is only one final vehicle. There are also some Proponents of Mind Only who assert that just as there are three vehicles, there are three final vehicles.

As for the MWS, although they do assert three vehicles—the hearers, the solitary realisers and the bodhisattvas—for this school, there is just *one* final vehicle.

³ The Hinayana tenets are the Great Exposition School (or the *Vaibhasika*) and the Sutra School (or the *Sautrantika*).

The Mahayana tenets do not accept that, upon achieving nirvana without remainder, the mental continua are severed whether it is with regard to the arhats or the buddhas. All the Mahayana tenets assert that, upon achieving full enlightenment, the mental continuum is *not* severed.

- All the Mahayana tenets assert that, upon achieving the full enlightenment that is simultaneous with the actualisation of the four kayas (or the four bodies), i.e., becoming a buddha, a buddha will continue to work for all sentient beings equalling the limitless extent of space for as long as samsara exists. This position of the Mahayana tenets is the *opposite* of what the Hinayana tenets assert.
- The Hinayana tenets assert that, whether they be arhats or buddhas, after having achieved the nirvana without remainder, their mental continua are severed.

So you have these two very different positions. Which one do you choose? The valid position is the one that makes more sense and does not contradict logic.

According to the Mahayana, the job is not done for those who have completed the hearers' path and the solitary realisers' path to become hearer arhats or solitary realiser arhats. They do not remain as arhats forever. According to the Mahayana, these hearer and solitary realiser arhats will have to enter and travel along the Mahayana paths and eventually achieve full enlightenment.

This is a brief introduction of what happens to and what the hearers, solitary realisers and bodhisattvas do after they complete their paths. This discussion is from the perspective of sutra.

From the perspective of Mahayana tantra

From the perspective of Mahayana tantra, one cannot achieve full enlightenment, i.e., enlightenment is not possible, by depending on the sutra path alone. Even a bodhisattva who has travelled the various bodhisattva grounds up to the tenth bodhisattva ground *cannot* achieve enlightenment without depending on the tantric path. That individual will still have to enter the tantric path in order to achieve enlightenment. Therefore on top of the sutra path, there is also the presentation of the paths and grounds according to tantra. So enlightenment is very far away and achieving it demands a great deal of effort.

Khen Rinpoche: So now we are going to see how far away it is. We are just looking down the road, looking at the map, to see far away enlightenment is.

Now is not the time to dwell on the reasons why one needs tantra and why one cannot achieve enlightenment by depending on the sutra path alone. This will come towards the end of the Basic Program. There is one module dedicated to a brief introduction on the tantric paths and grounds. At that time we will talk about the special features of tantra. Only by understanding these special features will you appreciate why you need the tantric path *in addition* to the sutra path.

THREE GREAT COUNTLESS EONS

Now we are going to look at the presentation of the Mahayana paths and grounds

according to the highest philosophical school, the CMWS. It is the general view of the Mahayana and also from the perspective of the CMWS that one needs to accumulate the collections over a period of three great countless eons. But do not despair for, according to tantra, it is possible to achieve enlightenment in one brief lifetime in one body!

Let us look at the accumulation of the collections during the first great countless eon. Where does this first great countless eon occur in relation to the five paths?

The five paths can be condensed into two:

- The paths of an ordinary being: the accumulation of the collections in the first great countless eon happens when one is still an ordinary being.
- The paths of a superior (or superior being): the accumulation of the collections in the second and third great countless eons is done as a superior, i.e., the person who is accumulating the collections at these times is not an ordinary being but is already a superior. *Arya* in Sanskrit means superior.

Impure and pure grounds

The accumulation of the collections in the second great countless eon takes place from the first to the seventh ground (or *bhumi* in Sanskrit). The first seven grounds are also called the seven impure grounds.

The accumulation of the collections in the third great countless eon takes place from the eighth to the tenth ground. The eighth, ninth and tenth grounds are known as the three pure grounds.

More details on these grounds will come later. For the time being, you must know that:

- The first seven bodhisattva grounds are impure grounds.
- The last three—the eighth, ninth and tenth bodhisattva grounds—are pure grounds.

Why are they termed impure or pure in this way? Why are the first seven bodhisattva grounds impure? Why are the last three bodhisattva grounds pure?

- The first seven bodhisattva grounds are called impure grounds because the bodhisattvas on these grounds have not yet abandoned the afflictive obscurations, i.e., they have not been purified of the afflictive obscurations.
- The bodhisattvas on the eighth, ninth and tenth grounds have already abandoned the afflictive obscurations and therefore are purified of the afflictive obscurations. Therefore the eighth, ninth and tenth grounds are called pure grounds.

As I mentioned earlier, the attainment of the eighth ground is *simultaneous* with the abandonment of the afflictive obscurations. When the bodhisattva abandons the afflictive obscurations, he achieves the eighth ground simultaneously.

When the bodhisattva completes the accumulation of the two collections during the third great countless eon, he achieves full enlightenment. He becomes a buddha and he achieves the Mahayana path of no more learning.

Path of learning and the path of no more learning

All the paths prior to that, starting from the paths of accumulation and preparation that are the paths of an ordinary bodhisattva and the paths of the arya bodhisattvas to the end of the tenth ground, one is still a sentient being. All these paths are called *the paths of learning (or learning paths)* because one is training and is still learning. The paths of learning occur during the time when one is a sentient being.

The terms *the path of learning* and *the path of no more learning* indicate that a buddha has learnt everything that is to be learned. A buddha has nothing more to know or to learn whereas, as a sentient being, one is still learning and progressing along the paths. Therefore during the time when one is travelling the paths as a sentient being, one is still on the path of learning.

In a way it is up to everyone to choose individually whether you want to learn or not, but in order to make that decision, you have to know where you are now. It is very clear that, unless you are already a buddha, obviously anyone else who is *not* a buddha still has things to learn. Please decide where you are.

Khen Rinpoche: If you are enlightened then there is no need to come to class.

Even the bodhisattvas who have achieved the unbelievably high attainment of the tenth ground still have not completed their training. They still have obscurations to be abandoned. They still have to continuously and joyously persevere in their training in order to become a buddha. From this we can understand that, until we are buddhas, there are always things to learn and room for improvement.

It is obvious that, as a sentient being, there will always be a time when we do not understand certain things. Some people get discouraged because they do not understand some things. When they get discouraged, they lose heart. Rather than losing heart, we should continue to learn by remembering that we are still sentient beings. We need to remember this.

Bodhisattvas who are travelling on these five Mahayana paths are either ordinary bodhisattvas or superior (or arya) bodhisattvas.

PATHS OF THE ORDINARY BODHISATTVA: THE PATH OF ACCUMULATION & THE PATH OF PREPARATION

What are the paths of the ordinary bodhisattvas? There are two Mahayana paths of the ordinary bodhisattvas:

1. the Mahayana path of accumulation
2. the Mahayana path of preparation

When does one become a bodhisattva? One becomes a bodhisattva when one enters the Mahayana path of accumulation. When one has achieved the Mahayana path of accumulation, it is said that one has entered the Mahayana path and one is on the way to buddhahood.

A bodhisattva is someone who has generated bodhicitta (or the mind or spirit of enlightenment). Bodhicitta can be divided into:

1. contrived bodhicitta
2. uncontrived bodhicitta

Contrived and uncontrived bodhicitta

Contrived bodhicitta arises when one puts effort into thinking about bodhicitta. The fully qualified bodhicitta arises but it requires effort. Having contrived bodhicitta does *not* make one a bodhisattva. Only when one generates uncontrived bodhicitta, the bodhicitta that, due to familiarity, arises spontaneously without effort, does one become a bodhisattva. This is indicated as “B” in the chart. When a person generates effortless or uncontrived bodhicitta, that person becomes a bodhisattva, is suitable to be called a bodhisattva and enters the Mahayana path as an ordinary bodhisattva.

Bodhisattvas of dull and sharp faculties

There are two types of individuals who generate bodhicitta and enter the path:

1. those of dull faculties who are followers of faith
2. those of sharp faculties who are followers of Dharma

Those who are of sharp faculties are said to be followers of Dharma, i.e., they are followers of reasoning. Before they generate bodhicitta, they investigate, analyse and think about emptiness. Those of sharp faculties are said to realise emptiness first. On the basis of having developed a correct understanding of emptiness, only then do they go on to generate uncontrived bodhicitta and become bodhisattvas.

What is bodhicitta? It is the thought, “I must achieve full enlightenment for the benefit of sentient beings.” So for those who are of sharp faculties before they generate bodhicitta, i.e., the thought pledging to achieve full enlightenment, they analyse why there is a need to achieve full enlightenment, whether enlightenment exists or not and whether it is attainable or not. It is only when they see that enlightenment actually exists and is attainable that they make the pledge to achieve full enlightenment.

In order for those who are of sharp faculties, in fact, for anyone, to be absolutely certain in their heart that enlightenment is a possibility, that it exists and is definitely achievable, these individuals must first have an understanding of emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality. Without this understanding, it is not possible to see that there is a state whereby all obscurations can be removed. Without understanding emptiness, it is not possible to have such certainty.

Therefore for those who are of sharp faculties, until they have achieved such an understanding of emptiness, they will not make the pledge, “I want to achieve full enlightenment for the benefit of sentient beings.” Those of sharp faculties will only make the pledge to achieve full enlightenment for all sentient beings *after* they are fully convinced that enlightenment exists and is attainable.

- In order for an individual to see that enlightenment exists and is attainable, that individual must first be convinced and realise that the obscurations, no matter how strong and powerful they may be, can be eliminated and removed from the mind.

- In order to realise this, first one must realise that antidotes to the obscurations exist. When one does not realise that antidotes exist, one will not see how the obscurations can be removed.
- And when we talk about the antidotes, the final conclusion is that there is nothing else beyond the wisdom or the mind that directly perceives emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality.

When we say that those of sharp faculties realise that enlightenment is possible because the obscurations can be removed from the mind due to the existence of the antidotes and so forth, we are not talking about some kind of general understanding. Those individuals must have a very personal conviction, in their own hearts believing that, “Enlightenment can be achieved because I am fully convinced that the obscurations I have are temporary and can be removed because it is possible for me to generate the antidotes to them.” This is the brief explanation of “A” in the chart.

“A”: inferential realisation of emptiness

In *lo-rig*, when we talked about the realisation of emptiness, it is either (1) an inferential realisation of emptiness or (2) a direct realisation of emptiness. Between a non-conceptual consciousness and a conceptual consciousness, the mind that realises emptiness at “A” is a conceptual consciousness. For this conceptual consciousness realising emptiness, between a direct valid cogniser and an inferential valid cogniser, the mind realising emptiness at “A” is an inferential cogniser realising emptiness.

The direct realisation of emptiness does not happen until the path of a superior bodhisattva (or arya bodhisattva) is manifested. This happens on the Mahayana path of seeing.

According to the CMWS, all the realisations of emptiness prior to “G” are either inferential cognisers or subsequent cognisers. This refers to:

- *prior* to entering the Mahayana path (“A”)
- *after* entering the Mahayana path (from “B” up to but not including “G”), i.e., on the paths of the ordinary bodhisattva, the Mahayana path of accumulation and path of preparation

As opposed to those who are sharp faculties, the persons of dull faculties are mainly followers of faith. Based on some belief or faith, they make the pledge to achieve enlightenment to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings. It is still possible to generate bodhicitta without a prior understanding of emptiness and there are individuals who do generate this bodhicitta. When they generate bodhicitta, they enter the Mahayana path, become a bodhisattva and actualise the Mahayana path of accumulation. From this you can see that there are bodhisattvas who do not have any understanding or realisation of emptiness.

The path of accumulation

The Mahayana path of accumulation has three divisions:

1. small path of accumulation
2. medium path of accumulation
3. great path of accumulation

As one progresses along these paths, the quality and the strength of the antidotes

increase over time, i.e., they become more powerful. With respect to the objects of abandonment, they become weaker over time. One starts off with many objects of abandonment that diminish over time.

In the case of generating the antidotes on the Mahayana path of accumulation, one starts with the small path of accumulation. As the antidotes grow stronger, one moves from the small path of accumulation to the medium path of accumulation. Then one moves from the medium path of accumulation to the great path of accumulation.

When one enters the Mahayana path of accumulation, one enters from the Mahayana small path of accumulation. Such an entry is contingent on one having generated uncontrived bodhicitta.

When we talk about mind generation, there are many divisions of mind generation. The mind generation at the point when one enters the Mahayana small path of accumulation is called the earth-like mind generation or the mind generation that is like the earth. The bodhisattva who is on the Mahayana small path of accumulation has uncontrived bodhicitta, i.e., he has the full realisation of bodhicitta, but that bodhicitta in the continuum of the bodhisattva on the Mahayana small path of accumulation is subject to degeneration, i.e., it is unstable and can deteriorate.

It is said that there are some bodhisattvas at this juncture who become discouraged and disheartened, thinking, “Sentient beings are so difficult,” or they may meet a Hinayana guru. Whatever the reason may be, they lose their bodhicitta, decide to give up the idea of achieving enlightenment, fall into the Hinayana path and become arhats, achieving liberation from samsara. It is most likely that such bodhisattvas are of dull faculties.

It is unlikely that bodhisattvas of sharp faculties would give up their bodhicitta because they have already concluded in their own mind, “Enlightenment is very good and is necessary. It is possible for me and I want to attain it.” Therefore it is unlikely that bodhisattvas of sharp faculties would ever give up their bodhicitta.

When the bodhisattva reaches the Mahayana medium path of accumulation, the bodhicitta in his continuum has become very stable. This bodhisattva will never ever give up his bodhicitta, the thought to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. The bodhicitta of the bodhisattva at this juncture is like gold and is called gold-like bodhicitta. Just as gold will never deteriorate and change into something else, the bodhicitta in the continuum of the bodhisattva on the Mahayana medium path of accumulation will never deteriorate and change.

At “C” in the chart, once the bodhisattva achieves the Mahayana medium path of accumulation, it is not possible for that bodhisattva to fall into the Hinayana because his bodhicitta will never degenerate.

Khen Rinpoche: That is why it is important that you all come to ABC to know the A, B, C (referring to these milestones in the chart). You know what “A” is. You know what “B” is. You know what “C” is. This is why ABC exists. I am joking.

There is another handout⁴ that you can read. In the next class we will go through the chart and the handout together. Hopefully I can finish this topic in one more class. It is good if you can get a clear general idea of how an individual progresses along these paths by referring to the chart.

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

⁴ Refer to *Mahayana Paths and Grounds according to the Consequence Middle Way School* that can be downloaded from the link in footnote (2).