

KHENPO GANGSHAR'S MAGIC KEY COMMENTARY ON MIPHAM RINPOCHE'S GATEWAY TO KNOWLEDGE

TRANSCRIPT SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE OF THE TEACHING

Teachings by 9th Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

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First of all, these instructions taught by Khenpo Gangshar on the ways to practice, or the philosophical schools, are wonderful instructions. I think that in order to teach them it really helps if you have some belief in them, and some real faith and excitement about doing them. Because if you have excitement (thro-wa) then you'll be able to be diligent about them, you'll be able to have faith and instruction and you'll be able to faith and interest in them. This will just keep developing. So in order to help you develop the faith and develop the this if you understand the history and the lineage of the power and the blessings of these instructions then this will be very helpful for you. So, first I will talk about the history.

So Khenpo Gangshar is not one of these masters who lived many centuries ago in some remote time, he's actually someone from recent times, just a few decades ago, someone who developed real realization and experience and developed real accomplishment. Then he gave many teachings and these were very helpful and powerful teachings that were unlike any other teachings. They were also teachings of exceptional power and blessings to them. So if you have faith and belief in them then I think it will help you to understand

them. For that reason, I'd like to talk about why you should be excited about receiving these teachings.

As it is said in Shantideva's *Entering the Way of the Bodhisattva* in order to embrace and increase these teachings then we should really develop excitement in our minds. If you're excited about something you need to do something. However, if you need to do something and are somewhat regretful about it, or not certain about it, then you aren't going to be able to do it well. If on the other hand, you have a real excitement about what you're going to do, you're going to be able to develop and increase what you're doing. For that reason, I would like to talk about the development of excitement about this.

The three Jamgons, Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche's Gateway to Knowledge composed at Thrangu Monastery

In order to help you develop this excitement, I want to tell you about the connection the lineage that this teaching comes from. So this teaching on the philosophical schools, or the ways to practice, primarily comes from the tradition of Mipham Rinpoche. Ju Mipham Rinpoche, who is one of the three lamas who was known in the 19th and early 20th century as the three Jamgons. These three Jamgons were first Jamgon Kongtrul, Yonten Gyatso or also known as Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye, second, was Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo also the third was Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche. So these are the three Jamgons who were well-known Tibetan masters. Jamgon Mipham followed Jamgon Kongtrul and Jamyang Khyentse as his root lamas. Then he continued his activity and taught the dharma. One of the things that he did was to go to Thrangu monastery in eastern Tibet and there was a retreat centre on the hill behind Thrangu monastery, in which he spent five years in retreat. While there, he composed a portion of his *Gateway to Knowledge*, (*Khe Jug*) the famous text by Mipham Rinpoche. This *Gateway to Knowledge* has three main sections. The first of these sections is made up of 10 points, the second of these is four summaries of the dharma, and the third is of the four proper awarenesses, or correctly distinguishing awarenesses.

So of these three different sections, the first the main section of the work is the ten points and these were composed while Mipham Rinpoche was staying in the retreat center at Thrangu monastery. As he composed them he had great compassion and had great aspirations. So later, there was a monastic college, a Shedra that was founded in that Thrangu monastery in the tradition of Mipham Rinpoche. So because of this it had great blessings. The Schechen Kongtrul Rinpoche came to Thrangu monastery, and when he came there he had various pure appearances and said at the time "Oh this is really a place where the blessings of Mipham Rinpoche are really strong". So this is a wonderful place with the particular blessings of Mipham Rinpoche, it's a place where because of his compassion, because of his intentions and his aspirations he's able to take care of the shedras, and to take care of us. So all of us who can read this text, we are able to be taken care of by his

compassion and aspirations. It's like the light of his compassion has struck us as well. We're able to receive the blessings of them and we can have real faith and real confidence in this.

So for myself, I had the opportunity to study these teachings at the time and because I received them, I have real confidence that if I tell them to you then these will be something very beneficial and very helpful for all of you.

The importance of the View for Mahamudra and Dzogchen Practice

Now, generally in Tibet there are many different dharma traditions that spread there, and all of these are the same in that they're the Buddha dharma. In terms of the actual view, in terms of the philosophical schools the ways of practice there are really not that great differences between them. Yet, in terms of our own individual practices, there are many different instructions that the Buddha gave, and they're all different in many ways and there are traditions for each of these, there are streams or continuums for each of these. So each has their own source and when we want to uphold and maintain that source of each of these, that is why there are the traditions of the different schools that developed.

In the Kagyu and the Nyingma traditions we do the meditations of Mahamudra and Dzogchen. When we do the meditation of Mahamudra and Dzogchen, if we have a philosophical school, if we have a view that really accords with the experience of Mahamudra and Dzogchen, then this is something that is really helpful. It will help if this view is helpful for our practice, if our view and understanding and our experience are something that are in accord and get along with our practice of mahamudra and Dzogchen, then our practice will be easy and it will fit with our views. Not only that, it will really help develop practice and real experience. If on the other hand, we have a view that when we study the texts we have one particular view, yet when we do practice we have another particular view, and these two don't fit with each other, then it doesn't work so easily at all. So here when we're studying the view of Mipham Rinpoche this is something that really fits very well with the view of mahamudra and of Dzogchen. So this really fits with the particular features of the view and of the philosophical schools.

So the author of this text that we are looking at is Khenpo Gangshar who is one of the main people to hold the lineage of Mipham. When he came to understand the view and the philosophical schools, he really did this in a way that followed Mipham Rinpoche. So for those of us who are practicing Mahamudra and Dzogchen, this is really good and really beneficial. He is someone who had a really particular special way of expressing it. Sometimes, when we look at the texts written by the ancient masters from India, or by the masters previous centuries in Tibet, we look at these texts and they're really difficult to understand. But when we look at a text by a modern master, from someone from our own time, it's really easy to understand, really simple and beneficial.

The great fortune of meeting the teachings and a teacher with compassion and a student with faith

So these words spoken by the lama are really important words but they're also really important for all of us these days, we students are really fortunate. Why is it that we are so fortunate? Well there's an example that we give about this in Tibet, it is said that when you have the connection between a student and the teacher, there is the hook of compassion, and there is the eyelet/hole of faith. You have to have both of these: the hook of compassion and the eyelet/hole of faith because if there is just the lama's hook of compassion, then that hook of compassion goes and it tries to catch on something but if there's no eyelet of faith, there's nothing for it to hook on to, it's just like some round spherical thing, there's nothing that it can grab onto and it doesn't do any good. On the other hand, if you have the eyelet of faith but you don't have the hook of compassion, then the eyelet of faith has nothing to catch on to that either. So it doesn't do any good. So you have both the hook of compassion and the eyelet of faith. For you of all who have faith in the dharma and so because of that there is this hook of compassion and the eyelet of faith, these two have come together and for that reason the teachings of the buddha have been able to come here.

Actually when we think about it, the Buddha's teachings spread first in India and India is a place that is very far away from here. There is a huge ocean in between the two places. So in olden days, there was no way that there could be much contact between the two. Nowadays, yes we do have intercontinental flights and we can fly from one to the other, and we can go there rather quickly, but still you know especially if you're like me, it's kind of difficult. You fly there and get really tired and just exhausted for a few days after you get there as it's a really long way to go and it seems really hard for the teachings of the Buddha to come over here. Yet it is like the compassion of the Buddha has really pushed it all together quite a bit, and so now it's like you know from one side, the Indians are being pushed over here by the compassion and your faith is strong and we have got this faith and compassion come together being smushed together in this way.

So now I'm able to come here and I'm able to teach you, I'm able to meet you and this is a really wonderful opportunity. Even if we compare it to how it was a couple of decades ago, at that time when you'd come to Dharma teachings you could listen to the teachings and that was about all you could do as there weren't that many books back then. It was really difficult to study dharma at that time. Yet now there are many translators who have translated a lot of works into English and you can all enjoy, read and study them. All this is a really wonderful opportunity. So the dharma has spread here in America and not only has this dharma spread here, you've also had the chance to encounter it, and can listen to it. But it's not that you just have to listen to it from the lama. Of course listening to the dharma from the mouth of the lama is a wonderful opportunity, but it's sometimes hard if you want to study them in detail you can actually read the works and study them in detail

The kindness of Dharma translators and the great Indian scholar who became like a shepherd

When the teachings of the Buddha spread to the snow land of Tibet when they translated something they first put the first word they put is 'in the Indian language'. Giving the title in Sanskrit. The reason that they put this is to remind us of the kindness of translators because at first, the Tibetans didn't speak Sanskrit. So when the dharma was brought into Tibet they wouldn't be able to read the text and even if they could sound them out they wouldn't be able to understand what the texts were saying. So when the translators actually translated these texts and spread them into Tibet it's to help us remember how kind they actually were in order to translate these texts. So in order for us to remember that kindness as being the kindness as it is, in the Tibetan texts they always begin by saying in the Sanskrit. this was the title. Now we have a lot of translators who are translating a lot of things and they're making plans to translate more into English and so this is really wonderful opportunity and it's a great way to help spread the dharma. It is also an extremely great fortune for all of you.

There's actually a story about this from history, there's a great Indian scholar, Murtijnana (?) which means the wisdom, or the gnosis of mindfulness. He was a great scholar who went to Tibet. As he was on the way to Tibet his translator passed away on the road and then it became very difficult for him he went places that this great scholar was unable to actually teach the dharma. He'd go everywhere and the people thought he's just this sort of Indian devil or something and he can't do anything. So he got so frustrated and was like a shepherd the time and just would go places and not be able to communicate with anyone, it was a really difficult thing. So later when Atisha went to Tibet he said, there was this great scholar, he's one of the best, no one in the west or the east of India could compare to them and he went to Tibet and he just became like a total shepherd. He had to go from village to village as a shepherd, and then Atisha said this is such a terrible waste that someone who is one of the greatest scholars in the west and east of India had to become like a shepherd in Tibet.

So there is this history and this shows us how important it is to have translators and how fortunate we are to have translators. Such as the other day, I was up in Ellsworth and I had to give a little talk but my translator was on vacation and it was really difficult and I couldn't say much more than just 'hello how are you'. So it's really important to have translators we should remember how important it is and not think of translators as being something unimportant but to support them. Also when they translate something it's important to study it, and actually practice it and if you do study and practice these it is really helpful .

The importance of treating Dharma books with kindness and respect and of high value

When we have dharma books in the old days in the west there just weren't many dharma books, they had western books, histories, and stories and various magazines and newspapers and so forth. So with these books they would do anything and throw them on the floor, bring them in the bathroom, do whatever and don't worry about paying any

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respect to them. But with Buddhist books we shouldn't do that. It's important for us to be really respectful of them. We should make sure not to put them on the floor, and not to put them underneath other things, not to put things on top of them, not to be disrespectful of them, not to step upon them. We should always put them in in good and clean places and have faith and devotion in them.

So when we think about this, sometimes people look at this, and they think 'that's really stupid. It's actually a book, it's just paper and it's ink, there's really nothing valuable about it. So it's kind of stupid to feel like you have to always take good care of it in this way.' So many people have said this to me, but actually that's not how it is. Although the book may be made out of paper and ink, it actually is something that has the power to help us develop loving kindness and compassion. It has the power to help us develop bodhicitta and develop our wisdom, to develop experience and realization. So it has that power to create all these qualities and it's not just something that we should just throw on the ground and disrespect. If we have real faith and interest in this book, then we will be able to really develop the power of it, it's something we'll be able to develop experience the power of it within our own mind streams. So we shouldn't treat it as if it's something disposable, and throw down and rip and not take care of.

It's like if you have a gold ornament or jewellery, then you think this is something really valuable and take good care of it, you polish it, put it in nice places and take good care of it and even have a jewellery box for it. So you see the value and because you see the value you take good care of it. It's the same with dharma books. When you see the value of the dharma books, then you can think to yourself, this is something that's really valuable and if it's something that will be helpful for you to appreciate the value of the book. Because you see that it is something that has the power to extract you from the suffering of samsara, and because you have that faith, then you'll be able to really experience the power that is inherent within that book and this is something that will be very helpful for you .

[Transcriber's note: we could say the same about women's bodies here too, which in Vajrayana have the nature and preciousness of being able to develop bliss, wisdom and awakening!].

Khenpo Gangshar on the meaning of Drubtha as End/Final Proof

Within this text on the philosophical schools, or the ways of practice, primarily there are two different types of philosophical schools: the Buddhist schools or the non-Buddhist schools. The Buddhist schools are all different and we call them philosophical schools, in Tibetan 'drub-tha', in Sanskrit Siddhanta. *Drub* means to prove and *tha* means the ends/limit of that proof. So when you prove something logically you come to some sort of an end and that is what we mean when we say a *drup-tha* or a philosophical school, or way of practice. We prove something logically, and then we get to the real point or the essence of something. So when we are doing the meditation of Mahamudra or Dzogchen, then

primarily we have two types of views: the view of direct perception and the view of inference.

In order to develop the view of direct perception if we have the view of inference as sort of a helper, then this is something that is really good for developing the view that comes from direct perception. So for that reason having the view that we develop through inferential reasoning is very important. We come to understand through logic and reasoning and it is very helpful in this.

In terms of this there are many different ways that we can prove things logically that we can talk about things many different views and here they're all taught very clearly. That is why it so important and very helpful to have this text on these philosophical schools. When we talk about the traditions of the philosophical schools and those that spread into Tibet, we first often talk about some schools that spread in India and in India, among the non-Buddhist schools there are what we call here the five types of the Tarkas, or sophists, the five Tarka schools and now actually there are many different philosophies in India but they can all be sort of summed up as these five groups of the Tarkas. So there are two basic types of these: those that have the nihilist views and those that have the eternalist views.

Actually here in the text it first talks about the eternalist schools, and then it talks about the nihilist schools. The other day I was reading a text by the Dalai Lama on the philosophical schools and he said that when we study this, although it is traditionally presented with the eternalist schools first, and the nihilist schools second, it's actually easier to understand if you present the nihilist schools first and then the eternalist school second. So, I also thought that that would be easier to understand and so first I will talk about the nihilist schools which is the Charvaka school.

[To summarise, the nihilist schools are similar to many views that people hold today, that there are no past or future lives, that there is no karma, cause and effect. However, Rinpoche stated that scientists cannot prove there are not these things either, because there are many things we cannot now see or understand but are still present or true.]

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