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# Ornament for Clear Realisation

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Last week I introduced the topic of the two Mahayana charioteers. Generally speaking, face-to-face learning is a much better platform for learning about *Ornament for Clear Realization* as it gives everyone an opportunity for direct questions and answers, which is important as it also makes our discussion more natural and fluid.

## The two charioteers (cont.)

The sutras, and the many commentaries on them, call Nagarjuna and Asanga the two Mahayana charioteers, or pioneers. Lama Tsongkhapa says in his text, *The Essence of True Eloquence*,

I bow my head to the feet of Nagarjuna and Asanga,  
Who pioneered the ways for champions of philosophy,  
With two interpretations of Sugata's sacred discourses,  
And make that superb doctrine of that Victor,  
Shine like sunlight throughout the triple world!

Here Tsongkhapa pays homage to Nagarjuna and Asanga as the charioteers who clearly distinguish the twofold hermeneutical meaning of the Buddha's supreme teachings, making it shine over the three worlds like the sun and the moon.

Nagarjuna clarified the explicit meaning of the Buddha's teaching on emptiness, on the basis of which he distinguished the interpretative and definitive meaning of Buddha's words and discourses by applying three criteria: the basis or the context of the Buddha's thought; the purpose; and countering perceived inconsistencies about the nature of reality. For example, he explained that the Buddha's discourse on things as being truly existent is for the sake of trainees who are not yet ready for the teaching on the voidness of true existence.

Nagarjuna explains the contextual meaning of the Buddha's statement that things are truly existent, and how this is different from the literal meaning. The purpose is to lead those trainees to gain the realisation of the lack of true existence. Since the view of true existence is contrary to reality, Nagarjuna refuted that view using countless reasons. Essentially, the diversity in the Buddha's way of teaching shows that the Buddha taught precisely according to the needs of the trainees based on their individual predispositions, interests and capacities. This demonstrates the Buddha's perfect skill in guiding his audience along the path to enlightenment. According to Nagarjuna, the Buddha's statement that all things are lacking true existence is the definitive meaning of the Buddha's speech.

Later on, Acharya Bhavaviveka expounded on Nagarjuna's teaching and became the charioteer or founder of the Svatantrika Madhyamaka school while

Chandrakirti became the charioteer or founder of the Prasangika Madhyamaka school. Then came Asanga, who wrote a number of treatises, such as the *Ornament of Sutras* in which he expounded the view of the Mind Only or Chittamatra school for those who are unsuited to learning the view of emptiness. Asanga was, however, well known as the charioteer who expounded the hidden or the implicit meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras.

Last week I raised the question as to why only Nagarjuna and Asanga and not other great masters are called Mahayana charioteers, so I'll try to explain it here.

Nagarjuna and Asanga are called charioteers because they were the first to decode the two-fold hermeneutical<sup>1</sup> meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras without depending on any other masters in this world. Later masters like Bhavaviveka, who was the founder of the Svatantrika Madhyamaka school, and Chandrakirti, who was the founder of the Prasangika Madhyamaka school, depended on Nagarjuna's texts.

There is however some justification in considering whether Maitreya can be regarded as a charioteer. We note that Tsongkhapa did not describe Maitreya as a charioteer. My view is that when we talk about charioteers, we are talking about someone who is the first to reveal the Buddha's teaching in this world. From this perspective, we can indisputably say that only Nagarjuna and Asanga are the charioteers because they are the first to reveal the explicit and implicit meaning of the Buddha's teachings. Even though Maitreya composed the *Ornament for the Clear Realization* which reveals the implicit meaning of the sutras, it was Asanga who, having learned this from Maitreya in the Pure Land of Joy, brought it to this world and disseminated it. So, Asanga was responsible for illuminating the implicit or hidden meaning of the Buddha's teachings in this world.

We will leave our discussion on the charioteers here. If you are interested, I suggest that you read it and discuss it with others. That way you can further your learning and knowledge of the Dharma.

## Commentaries on the text

As *Ornament for Clear Realization* is the main scripture that reveals the hidden meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras, we need to determine how many commentaries on *Ornament* have been written. There are said to be twenty-one popular commentaries in the Indian language. There are also many commentaries by Tibetan masters. Which of these twenty-one Indian commentaries did the Tibetan scholars use as their source? It was a text called the *Commentary Clarifying the Meaning* by the Indian master Acharya Haribhadra which they relied on because it has the attributes of having few words while making the meaning of the subject matter very precise and clear. In addition, Acharya Haribhadra was well known as a commentator because he possessed the three marvellous causes.

First, he had an unbroken lineage of instructions from the Lord Buddha, conveyed through masters like Maitreya, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Dignaga, Chandrakirti, and

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<sup>1</sup>Here, hermeneutical means the science of interpretation of scriptures.

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Vimuktisena and so on. The second cause is that he excelled in all five sciences of knowledge – the sciences of language, logic, medicine, arts and spirituality. Thirdly, he actually had a direct vision of Maitreya in the form of a meditational deity, and from whom he received permission to compose the commentary.

### **Types of spiritual path**

Before beginning the presentation on the *Ornament for Clear Realization*, I would like to briefly explain the types of spiritual paths.

Following a path implies going somewhere. In spiritual terms, following the path will get us to the state of liberation from samsara or the omniscience of a buddha. From the point of view of those who have entered the path, there are four beings: shravakas or hearers, pratyekabuddhas or solitary realisers, bodhisattvas and arhats or foe destroyers. Arhats means those who have achieved liberation, and this includes all ordinary beings.

You will find that having a background knowledge of all these different levels of the spiritual path and the spiritual beings who have entered into these paths very helpful later on as we begin our study of the *Ornament*.

The various stages of the path are like a roadmap to the states of liberation or enlightenment. Just as it makes our journey easier and more efficient if we are familiar with a map, road condition, places, facilities etc, before beginning our journey, likewise, if we become familiar with our spiritual path we will find traversing the path to liberation much easier and smoother.

There are four main Buddhist schools of tenets. The two lower schools are the Vaibhashika (Great Exposition) and Sautrantika (Sutra) schools, and the two higher schools are the Chittamatra (Mind Only) and Madhyamaka (Middle Way) schools. The Madhyamaka are further divided into two sub-schools called the Svatantrika Madhyamaka (Autonomist) and the Prasangika Madhyamaka (Consequentialist).

Our study of *Ornament* will be primarily based on the viewpoint of the Svatantrika Madhyamaka school. All the major commentaries written on the *Ornament for Clear Realization* in Tibet, including that by the great Tsongkhapa, are based on the viewpoint of the Svatantrika Madhyamaka school. So, our study of *Ornament* in the monasteries is based on the Svatantrika Madhyamaka school.

It is said the main benefits of learning about the stages of clear realisation, or the stages of meditation based on the Svatantrika Madhyamaka is that this makes it much easier to understand these stages from both the Chittamatra and the Prasangika Madhyamaka point of view.

### **Entering the path**

#### **Renunciation**

What does entering the path really mean? It means developing our mind to a higher state of consciousness such as developing true renunciation. In his *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, Tsongkhapa defines the measurement of having cultivated true renunciation as:

As you habituate in this way and when not even in an instant,  
Of admiration arises for the prosperities of cyclic existence,  
And when the thought aspiring for liberation arises day and night,  
At this point true renunciation has arisen.

Renunciation is an uncontrived and spontaneous aspiration to achieve liberation from samsara that is held night and day. As a result of reflecting on the rarity and impermanence of a precious human rebirth, and of the infallibility of the law of cause and effect, we can eliminate any attachment or attraction to samsara and then true renunciation can arise.

#### **Beginning the journey on the path**

When we talk about the spiritual path, we are talking about the stages of the development of our own state of mind, and cultivating true renunciation or bodhicitta marks us as entering the path. In other words, the spiritual path refers to gaining inner realisations, which can be the realisation of impermanence, the realisation of the emptiness of things and so on. The stages of the progressive development of these realisations are part of the path. But, as stated before, the starting point of the path begins with the cultivation of true renunciation or bodhicitta.

#### **Hinayana and Mahayana pathways**

What is the difference between the Mahayana or Great Vehicle path, and the Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle path? If the person's path is conjoined with bodhicitta, then they have entered into the Mahayana path and become Mahayanists. Whereas if the person's path is conjoined with renunciation, aspiring to achieve utter peace and liberation merely for themselves, they have entered into the Lesser Vehicle or Hinayana path and become Hinayanists.

What does the word 'conjoined' mean when we refer to the path being conjoined with bodhicitta? It means that the bodhicitta becomes the predominant force that has the effect of increasing all other realisations, such as wisdom realising the impermanence of all composed things. Similarly, when bodhicitta is conjoined with the wisdom of emptiness, then the wisdom of emptiness will have an effect of increasing bodhicitta.

#### **Followers of the path**

As I said earlier, the person who enters the path solely for themselves is a Hinayanist or follower of Lesser Vehicle. There are two Lesser Vehicles, which are the Shravaka or Hearer Lesser Vehicle, and the Solitary Realiser, or the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, and both hearers and solitary realisers are on the Hinayana path. What is the main difference between these two? The main difference relates to their knowledge of selflessness, in terms of what each eliminates or refutes as a result of their knowledge of selflessness.

In addition to hearers and solitary realisers, we have those who have entered the Mahayana path, who are called bodhisattvas. So, there are three types of beings on the path – bodhisattvas, hearers, and solitary realisers.

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## The five paths

Each one of these three spiritual beings follows the same five sets of paths, which are the paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation, and no more learning.

Those on the first two paths - the path of accumulation and the path of preparation - are ordinary beings who can be following the bodhisattva path, the hearer path, or the path of solitary realisers.

From the third path of seeing onwards, they become superior or arya beings, who are regarded as true examples of the Sangha refuge object. The main criteria to enter the path of seeing is the direct realisation of the truth.

For bodhisattvas, this means gaining a direct realisation of emptiness, at which point they become a superior or arya being of the Mahayana Vehicle.

For hearers and solitary realisers, this means gaining a direct realisation of the selflessness of a person. At that point, they become superior or arya beings of the Hearer Vehicle or the Solitary Realiser Vehicle.

The fifth or the last path is the path of no more learning.

Followers of the Lesser Vehicle (hearers and solitary realisers) reach the path of no more learning when they have completely uprooted and eliminated all mental afflictions. At that point they become arhats, or foe destroyers which means that they have destroyed the enemy of delusions and attained liberation from cyclic existence.

When the bodhisattvas enter the path of no more learning, both the afflictive obscurations and the obscurations to knowledge are completely eliminated. They have thus achieved complete enlightenment, and become a fully awakened being, or a buddha.

Many of you might already be familiar with the way bodhisattvas, hearers, and solitary realisers progress on these five paths. For those who are not familiar with this area, I strongly advise that you investigate these paths because we will come across these things later on in our study of *Ornament*.

In summary:

There are five paths which are the path of accumulation, the path of preparation, the path of seeing, the path of meditation, and the path of no more learning.

Bodhisattvas, hearers and solitary realisers all follow these paths.

Those on the first two paths are called ordinary beings. Those on the last three paths are called superior beings or aryas.

Those on the fifth path, the path of no more learning, are called arhats or foe destroyers.

Here I am just giving you an overview of all these terms, and we will go into more detail later on. There you will find how beings progress from one path to the next, and the qualifications or achievements necessary to move from one path to the path above that.

## Tenets and vehicles

Beginners can easily become confused about the distinction between followers of a Hinayana or Mahayana path, and proponents of a school of tenets.

As I explained earlier, there are four Buddhist schools of tenets: the Vaibhashika school, the Sautrantika school, the Chittamatra school, and the Madhyamaka school.

The Vaibhashika and Sautrantika schools are the two Lower Vehicle or Hinayana schools of tenets, while the Chittamatra and Madhyamaka schools are the two Great Vehicle or Mahayana schools of tenets. Note that the Madhyamaka school is further subdivided into the Svatantrika Madhyamaka and the Prasangika Madhyamaka schools.

What is the difference between a follower of the Hinayana or Lower Vehicle and a proponent of the Hinayana school of tenets? What is the difference between a follower of the Mahayana or Great Vehicle and a proponent of the Mahayana schools of tenets? Are these the same thing? Are there any differences? If so, what are those differences?

Just remember that when we talk about the follower of the Hinayana, we are talking about someone who has entered the Hinayana path. Likewise, when we talk about followers of the Mahayana, we are referring to someone who has entered the Mahayana path. From this perspective, we can have someone who is a Mahayanist while also being a proponent of the Hinayana school of tenets. You could also have someone who is a Hinayanist or follower of the Hinayana path, and who is a proponent of the Mahayana school of tenets.

Similarly, we can also talk about the sutras and commentaries on them being either Mahayana sutras and commentaries and Hinayana sutras and commentaries. Hence, the question is what makes these sutras and commentaries Hinayana or Mahayana sutras and commentaries? Is it something to do with the authors or the subject matter of them being Mahayana or Hinayana, or is to do with the status of those who follow these texts?

I will leave it here, otherwise we might come up with more questions.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson  
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