
Ornament for Clear Realisation

༄༅། །བསྟན་བཅོས་མངོན་པར་རྟོགས་པའི་རྒྱན།

Commentary by Venerable Geshe Lobsang Dorje

Translated by Sandup Tsering

25 June 2021

As to our discussion on the *Ornament for Clear Realization* by the Lord Maitreya, there are two main headings: a general introduction prior to the explanation of the text and the actual explanation of the text. We are currently on the introduction part, in which we find that the source sutra for this text is the *Perfection of Wisdom sutra*. We have discussed when, where and to whom the Lord Buddha taught this sutra.

Revision

After the Buddha left the world, his teachings were revived and disseminated by his followers who included a great number of arhats. Then, the Lord Maitreya composed the treatise called the *Ornament for Clear Realization*, clarifying the hidden meaning of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, of the progressive stages of realisation along the path to complete enlightenment.

Then, as Buddhism flourished in Tibet, we note that among the well-known twenty-one Indian treatises or commentaries on *Ornament*, the Tibetan lamas primarily followed the treatise by the Indian master Arya Haribhadra called the *Commentary Clarifying the Meaning*, and the good reasons for that choice.

I am giving you a summary of what we have already discussed as revision so that you think about what you have heard over and over again. In this way, you can firmly retain the teaching in your mind. Discussing the teaching with others is also an effective means of furthering your knowledge and not forgetting it.

Hinayana and Mahayana

Last week we talked about the two sects or vehicles in Buddhism called the Mahayana or Great Vehicle and the Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle. Those who follow the Mahayana are called Mahayanists and those who follow the Hinayana are the Hinayanists. We noted also that there are Buddhist schools of tenets or philosophy which can also be classified into the two Hinayana schools of tenets and the two Mahayana schools of tenets; accordingly, there are proponents of the Hinayana schools and proponents of the Mahayana schools of tenets. We also talked about the different criteria or grounds on which the difference between the Mahayanist Vehicle and the Hinayanist Vehicle is made, and their difference from proponents of the Mahayana and Hinayana schools of tenets. For instance, we can have someone who is a Hinayanist but is a proponent of Mahayana tenets, or a Mahayanist but is a proponent of Hinayana tenets.

When we say someone is a Hinayanist or a being of Hinayana or the Lesser Vehicle, what do we mean? How can we describe a Hinayanist or a being of Hinayana? Essentially, a Hinayanist is one who has entered the Hinayana path. Whereas when we talk about a proponent of the Hinayana school of tenets, the criteria of being a proponent of Hinayana tenets has got nothing to do with the Hinayana path – that is to say, whether that person has entered the Hinayana path or

not. Rather, the criteria of being a proponent of the Hinayana is being a proponent of the Hinayana schools of tenets.

There are four main Buddhist schools of tenets of which the first two, the Vaibhashika and the Sautrantika, are the two Hinayana or Lower Vehicle schools of tenets. The third and fourth - the Chittamatra and Madhyamaka schools - are the two Mahayana or Great Vehicle schools of tenets. So, the proponents of the Hinayana school of tenets must belong to one of the two Hinayana schools of tenets.

Likewise, whether someone is Mahayanist or not depends on the person having entered the Mahayana path. The criterion or the entry path for the Mahayana Vehicle is great compassion or bodhicitta. This means that anyone who has great compassion or bodhicitta is a Mahayanist or has entered the Mahayana path. Whereas when we talk about a proponent of the Mahayana school of tenets, then the person must be a proponent of one of two Mahayana schools, either the Chittamatra or Madhyamaka school.

Even though it is not intended, we can be misled into thinking that one vehicle is superior and the other inferior. Of course, there is no such thing as both are equally important and precious. To prevent such confusion His Holiness the Dalai Lama prefers to use the terms used by followers of the Pali and Sanskrit translations. The early Buddhist corpus is in the Pali language, whereas the later Buddhist corpus is in the Sanskrit language. The Hinayana, also known as Theravada, and the school of Elders, is the older Buddhist school and is based on the Pali language Buddhist corpus. The Mahayana or the Great Vehicle is based on the Buddhist corpus in the Sanskrit language.

As we have mentioned earlier, the main criterion to determine whether a person is Mahayanist or Hinayanist is the path the person follows. Those who follow the Hinayana path are Hinayanists and those following the Mahayana path are Mahayanists. So, we cannot have someone who is both; they must be one or the other. In other words, the Hinayana path and the Mahayana path are mutually exclusive. However, when we talk about a proponent of either the Hinayana or the Mahayana school of tenets, the criteria do not relate to the path but whether the tenets that the person asserts belong to the Hinayana or the Mahayana schools of tenets. Hence, we can have someone who is Hinayanist or on the Hinayana path and who is a proponent of the Mahayana schools of tenets, either the Chittamatra or Madhyamaka school. You can also have someone who is a Mahayanist or on the Mahayana path, but a proponent of the Hinayana school of tenets, either the Vaibhashika or the Sautrantika school. For example, we can have someone who has entered the Mahayana path of accumulation, and who holds the Hinayana tenets.

View of selflessness

In a nutshell, the main view of the Buddhist schools of tenets begins from the lower school to the higher school, from the most course to the most subtle level of view. In the first turning of the wheel of Dharma, the Buddha taught the view of selflessness, that things are empty of a self which is permanent, single and autonomous, and that things are empty of a being a substantially existent self or self-subsistence. This was taught to suit the mental capacity and the view of the followers of the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika schools respectively. Accordingly, both these schools posit that, through realising the selflessness as taught in the first turning of the wheel of Dharma, trainees can abandon all obstructions and achieve liberation.

Then, to suit the view and mental capacity of the followers of Chittamatra, the Buddha taught the *Samdhinirmocana Sutra* or *Sutra Unravelling the Thought*. In the third turning of the wheel of Dharma, the particular view that is taught is that there is no external object; the subjective mind and its object are empty of having a separate substance or entity. This view reflects the main view of the Chittamatra or the Mind Only School where they posit that meditating on this view will lead to the abandonment of all the mental obstructions and thus achieving liberation.

Finally, to suit the mental capacity of the followers of the Madhyamaka, the Buddha taught the second wheel of Dharma of non-characteristics, such as the discourses on the view of the emptiness of true existence in the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*. Accordingly, both Madhyamaka schools - the Svatantrika and the Prasangika - posit that by meditating on the emptiness of true existence the trainees can abandon all the obstructions and achieve complete enlightenment.

We find that each one of the four Buddhist schools of tenets posits its own unique philosophical view and pathway to liberation. We, however, should not see all those views as being completely unrelated. Rather, we must study, contemplate and meditate on all of them, and you will find that understanding the view of the lower school is very helpful for understanding the view of the higher school. So, from the bottom to the top, these four schools of tenets are like a stairway in the sense that we must understand the lower view first to understand the higher view.

Hinayana and Mahayana scriptures

Regarding the two categories of the scriptures - the Hinayana scriptures and the Mahayana scriptures - the criteria that will differentiate whether the scripture is Hinayana or Mahayana is primarily to do with the main audience of the scriptures. This is to say that if those in the main audience are proponents of the Hinayana school of tenets, the scriptures are Hinayana scriptures. Whereas if those in the main audience are proponents of the Mahayana school of tenets, they are Mahayana scriptures.

Actual explanation of the text

If we move to the actual explanation of the text, the presentation can be done under four headings:

- I. The meaning of the title
- II. The translator's homage
- III. The actual explanation of the meaning of the titled text
- IV. Conclusion

I. The meaning of the title

In the language of India i.e., Sanskrit the title is: *abhisamayālamkāranāmaprajñāpāramitopadeśasāstra*.

In English this is translated as: *Treatise of Quintessential Instructions on the Perfection of Wisdom, Ornament for the Clear Realizations*

This has two sub-headings:

- 1.1 The actual explanation of the meaning of the title
- 1.2 Ancillary topics on the presentation of the words and treatises.

1.1. The actual explanation of the meaning of the title

We can break down the meaning of each syllable of the Sanskrit title, starting with *abhisamayā*. *Abhisamayā* means 'clear realizations'; *lamkāra* means 'ornament'; *nāma* means 'so called'; *prajñāpāramita* means 'the perfection of wisdom';

opadeśa means 'quintessential instructions' and *sāstra* means 'treatise'.

When translating *Ornament* into Tibetan, the title of the text is left in the original language itself, which is Sanskrit: *abhisamayālamkāranāmaprajñāpāramitopadeśasāstra*. There are reasons why the translator rendered the title in the original Sanskrit language. It is said that all of the 1002 Buddhas of this fortunate aeon manifested the deed of complete enlightenment in Bodhgaya, and then delivered their Dharma discourses in the Sanskrit language. Therefore, the purpose of rendering the title in the Sanskrit language in the Tibetan version is to leave a good impression in the minds of those who study and contemplate this text and also to receive blessings in their continuum. The purpose of using Sanskrit is also to show the authenticity of the source of the treatise and to instill faith in it.

Next, we find the word 'ornament' in the title which is to imply that this treatise is an ornament. Here, ornament can be explained in terms of three ornaments - natural, beautifying and clarifying ornaments. For example, a body that is naturally beautiful or is adorned with a natural ornament can become even more beautiful when you put beautifying ornaments like bracelets etc. on it, which will give joy to the spectator who sees it. Or when you see the ornamented body in a mirror it is like a clarifying ornament, as it captures the other two ornaments of the body. In the same way, this treatise is an ornament satisfying those who study and contemplate, as through it they can see the natural ornament of the mother wisdom's body adorned by eight beautifying ornaments of clear realisations, characterized or magnified by the clarifying ornaments of the seventy meanings or topics. The main subject matter of the *Ornament for Clear Realization* is the eight clear realisations, which are like a beautifying ornament, and the seventy meanings or topics that explain or clarify the meaning of these are like clarifying ornaments.

Now we will move to the next sub-heading which is:

1.2 Ancillary topics on the presentation of the words and treatises

This text, the *Ornament for Clear Realization*, is regarded as a treatise or a commentary or *tenchoe* in Tibetan. We can talk a little bit about the differences between the words and treatises. Normally, when we say, 'words' or 'speech', it can come from anyone, for example, our parents or from the king and so on. But here where it says, 'words' it refers to the words of the Buddha or in Tibetan *ka*. The question is, how can we determine whether someone's word is the Buddha's word or not? What is the nature or entity of the Word? What is the difference between the Word and treatises?

Maitreya wrote *Ornament* but the text is classified as a treatise and not the Word, even though he was already a buddha.

The Buddha's Word or *ka*

Let's discuss the meaning or the description of the Word, the divisions of the Word and the nature and entity of the Word. According to one text, the Word - or *ka* in Tibetan is defined as 'the supreme speech of a buddha possessing four special qualities'.

The four special qualities of the Word are:

- Its content is the path leading to liberation and complete enlightenment,
- It must be perfect speech, without any fault,
- Its function is having the capacity to eliminate

mental afflictions,

- Its purpose is to pacify all suffering.

With regard to these qualities, the first, in terms of the audience to whom the Word is addressed, has two categories: the Hinayana and the Mahayana Words.

The Buddha's Words can be divided into three which are the spoken Words, the Words by subsequent permission and the blessed Words.

You will find that, at the beginning of the sutras, there is a standard wording that describes the context - the time, the place and the number of attendants. This section is considered as the Buddha's Word by subsequent permission because the Buddha advised that 'when you compile my work, you need to mention the time, the place and who was there to listen to my teachings'. So, the Buddha approved this quality prior to the compilation of the discourses.

The Buddha's words, called the 'blessed words of the Buddha', are not like the Buddha's words by subsequent permission, because they were never spoken by the Buddha himself. But they become the Buddha's word through the blessing of the Buddha's body, speech and mind. For example, in the *Heart Sutra* there is a dialogue between Shariputra and Avalokiteshvara which is the blessed Word. The dialogue is a direct verbal conversation between the two, and while this is happening, the Buddha is absorbed in meditative equipoise. Nonetheless, the dialogue is blessed or instigated by the Buddha's concentration in meditative equipoise. Likewise, through the Buddha's 'blessing powers' the teaching on impermanence and so on can come from the sound of the divine drum and wrestling leaves of trees. These teachings are categorised as the blessed words of the Buddha too.

Now, regarding the nature and entity of the Word, what actually is the Buddha's Word? Is it a sound or is it connected with a consciousness? The answer is that the Buddha's Word is a sound. But there are others who posit that it is not a sound, but something which exists within the continuum of a being. After the disciples had heard the teaching from the Lord Buddha, they remembered the teaching in the form of memories. Therefore, there are some who assert that the Buddha's words can exist within the continuum of the trainees because we say that the Buddha's teaching is still alive.

We should not get too confused about what is the Word, but at least try to remember that the Buddha's Word has the four special qualities mentioned above.

Treatise or *tenchoe*

Now, if we move to the treatise or commentary, that is defined as a pure speech that possesses the two qualities of elimination and protection.

The quality of elimination means eliminating all the enemies of mental afflictions, whilst protection means protecting from the fear of the hell realms and samsara.

This text, *Ornament*, was written by Maitreya and it is his words and writing, so he is the owner. The question is: if we memorise this text and then we recite it, is our recitation also Maitreya's actual *Ornament* text or not?

Usually when we say it is somebody's words, then that word exists within the continuum of that person. Therefore, *Ornament for Clear Realization* is a speech or the writing of Maitreya, and therefore it should exist in the continuum of Maitreya. If that is the case, what about the *Ornament* text in

our memory? What about our memorisation of a single line from the text, for example, 'a wish to achieve perfect and complete enlightenment is bodhicitta.' So, when we verbally say that line, are we saying a line from Maitreya's *Ornament* or not? It can be because our speech is something that exists within our continuum.

When we talk about the difference between the Buddha's Word and the treatise, the text concludes that all the Buddha's words can be a treatise, but not the other way around. The treatise can be composed by someone who is not a buddha and therefore it cannot be the words of the Buddha. So, something that is a treatise is not necessarily the word of the Buddha.

We say that this text or treatise, the *Ornament for Clear Realization*, is not the Buddha's Word, but it is in a sense a word and speech. So, if it is speech then it must be the speech of someone. It must come from someone's mouth. Are we going to say that it is the speech that comes from Maitreya Buddha?

When we regard the *Ornament* as the speech of Maitreya, as I said, it is a speech. But if it is a speech, then we must know whose speech it is. If it is Maitreya's speech, it means that when we recite this *Ornament* from our mouth, the word that comes from our mouth is not Maitreya's speech. Based on the same reasoning we can also ask the same question when we chant a mantra - like the six-syllable *om mani padme hum* mantra - are we chanting the real mantra or not? That is also debatable.

Then, some define the Buddha's Word as 'the supreme speech of a Buddha for the sake of eliminating the mental afflictions within the continuum of sentient beings.' Is this definition correct or not?

[student:] *A question. When Ornament is translated into another language and then into English, is it the speech of Maitreya?*

A good question, but I am not going to say anything more now. Maybe think about it and discuss it with others. Maybe you will have more questions. I will try to give some sort of summary on this later.

If we say the words of the *Ornament* that we recite are not the speech of Maitreya, then obviously the Tibetan or the English version of the *Ornament* is not Maitreya's *Ornament*.

Also bear in mind that when we talk about the treatise or the Word, we are not talking about the hard printed copy of the texts or even a digital version, because it is a sound. The printed copy is just the medium of the actual teaching or text.

There is no question that the treatise or the Word should be a word or speech.

So, it is a sound. Another question that I can raise is how the Solitary Realisers give teachings through their ability to be able to teach with body language without using any words. So, what about those teachings? Are they not speech? They are not a teaching; so, what is it?

Just keep stimulating your mind with as many questions as you like. This is good for developing your knowledge.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Llysse Velez
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute