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# Ornament for Clear Realisation

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30 July 2021

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Last week we began a discussion on the wheel of Dharma.

When you bring up a different topic for discussion it is important to know its relationship to your previous discussion. For example, at the moment our discussion is on the wheel of Dharma, so it is important that we know how this topic relates to the study of *Ornament*.

You will also find the terms ‘the wheel of Dharma’, and ‘Dharma wheel’ used quite frequently in the sutras. We have come across this term here in relation to our study of *Ornament* and it relates to the author’s expression of homage, where the homage is paid to three knowers. Of the three knowers, it relates to paying homage to the third knower, the *exalted knower of aspects*. The line in the homage says that by depending on their omniscient mind as an empowering condition, exalted knowers of aspects are able to expound the various teachings to all sentient beings or trainees, in order to help them eliminate mental afflictions.

In relation to the meaning of ‘exalted knower of aspects’ in the expression of homage, Haribhadra’s commentary, *Clarifying the Meaning*, says ‘The wheel of Dharma is turned fully around all the aspects’. The purpose of turning the wheel of Dharma is for all sentient beings to eliminate their mental afflictions. Therefore, all the teachings or words of the buddhas and the stages of the spiritual path are like weapons or antidotes that eliminate the mental afflictions of sentient beings.

The wheel of Dharma refers to the Buddha’s teachings, as well as inner realisations, and is a metaphor in the sense that it parallels the use of a wheel by a Chakravartin king in a number of ways. The king, by depending on that wheel, can move from one place to another and along the way defeat enemies and gain victories. Similarly, through the study and contemplation of the Buddha’s teachings and by gaining inner realisations, spiritual trainees can counteract obstructions and move progressively, stage by stage, along the spiritual path to enlightenment.

As you may recall from last week, the Dharma wheel is elaborated under six headings:

1. The nature of the Dharma wheel.
2. The divisions within the Dharma wheel.
3. The meaning of interpretive and definitive.
4. The measurement of the heap of Dharma.
5. The manner of turning the wheel of Dharma.
6. The etymology of the term Dharma wheel.

## 1. The nature of the Dharma wheel

Last time we defined the nature or entity of the Dharma wheel as ‘a virtuous quality included within either of the Buddha’s word or an inner realisation on the path’.

Accordingly, when you think of what a Dharma wheel means, you need to think of the two components of this definition and the Dharma wheel that is included within either of the two:

- It should be a virtuous quality
- It is either of the Buddha’s word or the inner realisation on the path.

At the end of last week’s teaching, I raised the question as to why the word ‘included’ is used in the definition of a Dharma wheel. What’s wrong with the definition if we don’t use the word included, and instead simply say it’s a virtuous quality which is either of two components? The reason why I have raised this kind of question is to make you think and analyse things in a constructive, logical and effective way.

If the word ‘included’ is removed from the definition, then what we end up with is that the Dharma wheel is a virtuous quality that is either the Buddha’s word or an inner realisation on the path. If that is so, there should be a two-way pervasion between the definiendum<sup>1</sup> and definition – from the definition to the definiendum, and definiendum to the definition.

When we think of pervasion from definition to definiendum in the definition of Dharma wheel, if the word ‘included’ is missing, there probably is a pervasion, because we cannot think of a virtuous quality which is neither a Buddha’s word nor an inner realisation on the path, which is not a Dharma wheel.

The next question is this: is there a pervasion from definiendum to definition? Is a Dharma wheel necessarily either of the two? Can we think of something that is a Dharma wheel but is neither the Buddha’s word nor the inner realisations on the path? In other words, is it necessary that if it is a Dharma wheel it must be either of the two, not just included within either of the two? Here we are looking at the implied meaning of the word ‘included’.

If I give you an example it may make it a bit clearer. Can you think of something which is not either me or Sandup, but which can be included within either of us? What if you say, both of us? Both of us is not either one of us, but it is included within either the two of us. Likewise, if we say both the words of the Buddha or inner realisations on the path. These together are included within either of the two, but together it is neither one. When you say ‘included’, it is something belonging to that thing, but not necessarily that thing itself. You can debate the usage of the words.

Let me ask you another question which I want you to think about. When someone gains an inner realisation, along with it they can achieve the truth of cessation. So why is this truth of cessation not a Dharma wheel? In this case it is straightforward because the truth of cessation does not satisfy both components of the definition and it is also not a virtue. It is not a virtuous quality (Tibetan: *ge-wa* དགེ་བ), because if it’s a virtue, it has to be an impermanent or a compounded phenomenon. The truth of cessation as an entity is considered to be a permanent and un-compounded phenomenon, therefore it cannot be a

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<sup>1</sup> Definiendum is the thing that is to be defined especially in a dictionary

entry, or which is introduced into a logical system by being defined.

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virtue. Also, it doesn't satisfy the definition of being included within either the Buddha's words or the inner realisations on the path.

Let me raise another question. Is Haribhadra's commentary, *Clarifying the Meaning*, a Dharma wheel? Is the text we are currently studying, *The Ornament for Clear Realization*, a Dharma wheel or not? When you think of these treatises, they satisfy the first part of the definition, which is a virtuous quality. But are they included within either of the two, i.e. the Buddha's words or the inner realisations on the path? Obviously, they are not inner realisations on the path because they are treatises or commentaries. Therefore, what remains to examine is whether they can be included within the Buddha's words or not.

In discussing whether these treatises, *Clarifying the Meaning* and *The Ornament for Clear Realization*, are the Buddha's word or not, we have to remind ourselves about what we discussed earlier on the Buddha's word, in particular the definition of the Buddha's word. Do these treatises fulfil the definition of the Buddha's word? If so, of course, you can say 'Yes, it is the Buddha's word' or if it doesn't, 'No it's not'.

Obviously, the treatise *Clarifying the Meaning* is not the word of the Buddha. As to whether *The Ornament for Clear Realization* is Buddha's word or not, we can consider whether the author of that text is the Buddha or not.

As we discussed earlier, the Buddha's words can be categorised into blessed words, spoken words, and permitted Buddha's words. If it is spoken or authored by the Buddha, it is the Buddha's word. Therefore, the question here is whether Maitreya is a buddha or not?

This question is a major topic of contention or debate among the various Tibetan scholars. Some scholars say that Maitreya is a buddha, and there are many others who say he's not a buddha and they have their own sources and reasons. Both schools – those which posit Maitreya as a buddha and those which don't – must primarily rely upon the scriptural sources to prove their assertions.

Sera Jey follows the school which posits Maitreya as a buddha. In relation to Maitreya being a buddha, one of the important scriptural sources is the commentary on Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum* called *Gyu lamey-darti* by Gyaltshab Je, which says, '... the reason why it is said is to accord with and for the sake of inspiring some common trainees. In the definitive sense, it is not so because Bhagavan Maitreya himself had already actualised complete enlightenment in the dharmakaya.' So, it is said here that Maitreya had already attained complete enlightenment but assumed the aspect of a bodhisattva named Maitreya to inspire common beings.

Another very important source that cites Maitreya as a buddha is Tsongkhapa's *The Great Exposition on the Stages of Tantra* which says, 'They are fully enlightened in reality, however, there is no contradiction that they don't manifest their buddha's deeds to common beings. For example, Maitreya and others came in this world as the attendants of the Buddha Shakyamuni.' Here, Tsongkhapa makes it very clear that Maitreya is a buddha.

In deciding whether a word is the Buddha's word or not, we need to take into account if it's a spoken word, if the person who spoke that word is a buddha, and if the speech has been blessed or pre-approved by a buddha or not. If none of these apply, it cannot be a buddha's word or speech. This is an extensively debated topic.

## 2. The divisions of the Dharma wheel

Last week, after defining the Dharma wheel, we also said that there are two types of Dharma wheel: the oral Dharma wheel, and the realised Dharma wheel. Also, we spoke of divisions of the Dharma wheel in terms of the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma, such as the first turning of the Dharma wheel of the four noble truths, the second turning of the Dharma wheel of non-characteristics, and the third turning of the Dharma wheel of perfect distinctions.

## 3. The meaning of interpretive and definitive

I also mentioned in the last teaching how all the Dharma wheels, such as the three Dharma wheels, can be categorised into definitive and interpretive sutras. Of the three Dharma wheels, the first and third Dharma wheels are interpretive sutras, whereas for the second Dharma wheel there are both definitive and interpretive sutras. This relates to the definition of an interpretive sutra which provides two descriptions and either of them will fulfil the definition.

The first description is that an interpretive sutra is a sutra that explicitly presents conventional truth as the main subject matter. The second description is that the sutra is literally unacceptable. So, with respect to the second wheel of Dharma, the *Heart Sutra* is an example of an interpretive sutra. Whereas the extensive, middling and very condensed version of the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras are definitive sutras.

We said the *Heart Sutra* is an interpretive sutra. If we take into account the two descriptions in the definition of an interpretive sutra, the *Heart Sutra* must satisfy one of them to qualify as an interpretive sutra. But which one? It has to be a sutra that explicitly presents conventional truth or is literally unacceptable. So, which one would qualify the *Heart Sutra* as an interpretive sutra?

*Student: It is literally unacceptable.*

You said that the *Heart Sutra* is literally unacceptable? Why can't you also say the extensive, middling, and condensed *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras are literally unacceptable? In fact, they are literally acceptable. The *Heart Sutra*, along with the three versions of the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras are the same in presenting emptiness as the main subject matter. So, the question is really which of the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras are literally acceptable, and which are not?

According to the Prasangika school of tenets, the *Heart Sutra* as well as all the versions of the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras are definitive sutras. The different views of the schools of tenets, with regard to whether these are definitive or not, is due to the varying views of the meaning of emptiness held by the different schools, in terms of each school's position on the object of negation. Due to these different views of the object of negation,

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different views of emptiness arise, hence the differences in categorising what is definitive and interpretative.

However, here we are primarily following the Svatantrika Madhyamika view, according to which the three versions of the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras express emptiness, in terms of things being empty of ultimate and true existence. They say form and so forth do not truly exist. Whereas the *Heart Sutra* literally expresses emptiness in terms of things being void of existence by way of their own characteristics or nature. This view of emptiness is not accepted by the Svatantrika Madhyamikas. They say that things do exist by way of their own characteristics, or by their own nature, and exist inherently.

The third turning of the wheel of Dharma mainly presents the view of the Cittamatra school. According to that view, there are three major divisions of phenomena:

- Imagined or imputed phenomena (ཀུན་བརྟམས་ *kun btags*)
- Ultimate phenomena (གཞན་དང་། *gzhan dbang*)
- Other dependant phenomena (ཡངས་གུབ་། *yongs grub*)<sup>2</sup>

The third turning of the wheel of Dharma expresses these three natures.

Other-dependent phenomena and ultimate phenomena truly exist, and only imputed or imagined phenomena are empty of true existence. Therefore, the third turning of the wheel is an interpretive sutra. Likewise, the main subject matter of the first turning of the wheel of Dharma is the four noble truths, which belong to the category of conventional truth. So, this is considered to be an interpretive sutra.

Last time we touched on the question of whether the presentation of the turning of the three wheels of Dharma by the Buddha were given successively or simultaneously.

If we relate this to the life story of the Buddha, he turned the first wheel of Dharma on the four noble truths in Varanasi after he had achieved enlightenment. After that he taught the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutra at Vultures Peak and then, finally, he turned the third wheel of Dharma at Vaishali. From this historical context, it seems clear that the three turnings of the wheels of Dharma occurred at different times. But we also find in some major textbooks that the Buddha taught all three wheels of Dharma simultaneously, as well as successively. We need to understand how this could be possible. On the surface, being either simultaneous or successive looks like it is contradictory. If it is simultaneous then it can't be successive. So, how are we going to reconcile the Buddha teaching these three wheels simultaneously and successively as said in those major texts?

### The realised Dharma wheel

We noted that there are two types of Dharma wheel, an oral Dharma wheel and a realised Dharma wheel. A realised Dharma wheel is defined as a virtuous quality included within the inner realisation on the path (or included within the continuum of those who have entered the path). There are three types of realised Dharma wheel, which are the three trainings included within the inner realisations on the path.

Given the above definition, we can now consider whether realisations such as great compassion and bodhicitta, which we often hear about, are a realised Dharma wheel or not. Are great compassion and bodhicitta a realised Dharma wheel?

Is great compassion an inner realisation on the path or an inner realisation of one who has entered the path? How can that be? Bodhicitta is the gateway or the entrance door to the Mahayana path. When bodhicitta arises within the continuum of a person they enter the Mahayana path. Great compassion is regarded as a cause to give rise to bodhicitta, so at the time of great compassion, the person has not yet entered the Mahayana path. So great compassion is not an inner realisation on the path, because it can also exist within the continuum of someone who has not entered the path. However, maybe we can say that great compassion is included within the inner realisation on the path or is included within the continuum of someone who has not yet entered the Mahayana path.

*Student: What about great compassion for someone who has already entered the Hinayana path?*

That's true, they have entered the path because they have entered the Hinayana path before. However, even though they possess great compassion they have not yet entered the Mahayana path.

Someone who enters the Mahayana path without having previously entered the Hinayana path may possess great compassion but have not yet entered any path. Therefore, their great compassion is not an inner realisation on the path. We can note here that great compassion, as a generic term, can exist within the continuum of both of those who have entered the path and those who have not entered the path.

Is that generic term, great compassion, within the continuum of somebody who is on the path, or someone who is not on the path, or both or neither? You can't say that generic great compassion is an inner realisation of somebody on the path because it can also be within the continuum of someone who is not on the path. So, we can't say generic great compassion is on the path, nor can we say it is not on the path.

In debates in the monastery, the one who is seated is a defender or responder. The one who stands and poses questions is the challenger. When the defender posits a statement, the challenger's role is to keep questioning and questioning until he is satisfied with all the reasons. The challenger will not easily let go until the defender provides satisfying explanations and reasons. In this way, the more questions and answers there are, the more knowledge those involved in the debate will gain. If the defender is very learned, then the main way you can tap into his full knowledge is by posing many questions. It is also very important in the debate to maintain the topic in question during the full analysis. Otherwise, there is a danger of losing interest and the momentum of the debate, not to mention a conclusive outcome relating to the given topic.

So, in a discussion, it is important when someone makes a statement that you don't simply assume that you

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<sup>2</sup> The English translation used in previous teachings is: other-powered,

thoroughly established, and wholly labelled.

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understand, or you leave it there. You must find out the reasons and logic behind the statement. That is how you learn new things. You might agree with something they are saying, however, the reasons that you and the other person have might be different. So, it is very important to not simply assume that what they are saying is true, or that they understand it or that you understand them. You just have to use an open mind to find out more.

#### **4. The measurement of the heap of Dharma**

Relating that to our study of the Dharma wheel, I think we are up to the fourth subheading which talks about the measurement of the heap of Dharma.

When we say the collections of Dharma or heap of Dharma, which in Tibetan is *cho-phung* (ཚོས་ཕུང་), we are talking about a certain heap or pile of Dharma teaching. Here the question is, how do we measure the size of one heap of Dharma or *cho-phung*?

In the text it says that a Dharma teaching, which presents a complete set of antidotes to each of the mental afflictions, is posited as the size of each Dharma heap. So, any Dharma heap should present a whole set of antidotes or remedies to any particular mental affliction.

As I mentioned earlier, in the text it is said that the Buddha taught the three wheels of Dharma simultaneously as well as successively. So, I want everyone to have a think about this and come up with an idea of how this is possible, without any contradictions.

We will be moving on to the topic of the meaning of each of the three knowers: the knowers of the base, the path, and then the exalted knower of all aspects. So, if you have any commentaries or references on the *Ornament of Clear Realization*, maybe just read through those and look at the meaning or definitions of each of the three knowers. Having some prior knowledge of the topic will be helpful when you listen to the teaching.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson  
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Edited Version*

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