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# Ornament for Clear Realisation

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Commentary by Venerable Geshe Lobsang Dorje

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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## The oral wheel of Dharma (cont.)

As we have learnt, there are two types of Dharma wheel: an oral wheel of Dharma and a realised wheel of Dharma. Last week we discussed the oral wheel of Dharma, which can be subdivided into the three wheels of Dharma that the Buddha turned.

### The three wheels of oral Dharma

One school of thought says that the term ‘wheel of Dharma’ is explicitly mentioned in the *Sutra Unravelling the Thought*, which gives a clear indication of who gave each discourse on each wheel of Dharma, the place where the discourse on each was given, the audience for each discourse and the subject matter of each of them.

#### The first wheel of Dharma

*Unravelling the Thought* explicitly says that the main subject matter of the first wheel is the four noble truths. The definition of the first wheel of Dharma, as we saw last week, is *the uncommon Hinayana sutra which explicitly presents the four noble truths as the main subject matter*.

There must be a reason for the inclusion of the words ‘uncommon Hinayana sutra’ because if there is no reason these words are redundant. I raised this issue towards the end of last week’s session. What problems will arise if we don’t include these words in the description of the first wheel of Dharma? The definition would then be ‘the sutra that explicitly presents the four noble truths as the main subject matter’.

In thinking about that, we must see the inconsistencies arising from that definition because the definition and the definiendum must have a two-way pervasion. Without those words, we would be talking about a sutra that explicitly presents the four noble truths, but which is not the first wheel of Dharma. We would also have a sutra that belongs to the first wheel of Dharma, but which does not explicitly present the four noble truths. The latter option is not feasible because the definition states that the four noble truths are the main subject matter of the first wheel.

Therefore, to resolve this, our focus should be on coming up with an example of a sutra that explicitly presents the four noble truths as the subject matter, but which is not the first wheel of Dharma. There is a sutra that is part of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras in 100,000 lines or 20,000 or 8000 lines, where the subject matter is the four noble truths. This is an instance where the main subject matter of the sutra is the four noble truths, but which doesn’t belong to the first wheel of Dharma.

How do we know there is this section in the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in One Hundred Thousand Lines* that discusses the four noble truths? One way is to refer to the *Ornament for Clear Realisation* which says:

With regard to the mode of knowers of paths,  
By way of the non-apprehension (of the true existence)  
Of the aspect of the four noble truths  
These paths of hearers are to be known.

This verse implies that the knower of paths has the realisation of the four noble truths; hence the subject of the four noble truths is mentioned. The *Ornament for Clear Realisation* is a commentary to this Perfection of Wisdom sutra. In other words, the source text for *Ornament* is the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in One Hundred Thousand Lines*. Therefore, we must assume that the verse in *Ornament for Clear Realisation* mentioning the four noble truths should be referenced back to the *Perfection of Wisdom in Ten Thousand Lines Sutra*, which must also contain the subject matter of the four noble truths.

We can also think of many other Mahayana sutras which also have content that primarily deals with the four noble truths. Because these are Mahayana sutras they cannot be classified as the first wheel of Dharma because they are not uncommon Hinayana sutras.

#### The second wheel of Dharma

The *Sutra Unravelling the Thought* also gives a clear description of how the Buddha turned the second wheel of Dharma: where and to whom and the main subject, which is emptiness. Hence, the definition of the second wheel of Dharma, as the Sera Jey Paramita general meaning states, is *an uncommon Mahayana sutra that explicitly presents emptiness as the main subject matter*.

Just as it was necessary for the definition of the first wheel of Dharma to include the words ‘uncommon Hinayana sutra’ we should also examine why we need to include the words ‘uncommon Mahayana sutra’ in the definition of the second wheel of Dharma. If we don’t include those words, what kind of problems will arise?

One problem that will arise is that there are Hinayana sutras, such as a section of the sutra called *Lung-Teng Tseg* in Tibetan, addressing Arya Katayana, that explicitly indicates emptiness as its main expressed subject matter. This sutra would fulfil the definition of the second wheel of Dharma if we omit the words ‘uncommon Mahayana sutra’ but it is not the second wheel of Dharma because it is not an uncommon Mahayana sutra. The source to show how the *Lung-Teng Tseg Sutra* explicitly mentions emptiness is Nagarjuna’s text *Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way*<sup>1</sup> which says, ‘the Bhagawan who knows what things exist and don’t exist, refuted both existence and non-existence in his advice to Katayana.’

Despite this, there is some debate about whether a discourse on emptiness was ever given to followers of the Hinayana path by the Buddha. In fact, some quote a line from Tsongkhapa’s text *The Essence of Eloquent Speech that Differentiates Interpretable and Definitive*, implying that there was no presentation of emptiness to those on the Hinayana path. We, however, interpret that line by saying

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<sup>1</sup> Called *Root Wisdom* in transcripts from previous years.

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it means there is no presentation on emptiness in any uncommon Hinayana sutras but there is in sutras that are common to both Hinayana and Mahayana.

We really must give a lot of thought and logical analysis to ensure that what we learn from various scriptures do not contradict one another so that we maintain our position consistently with logic. Developing the right interpretation of all these different sources requires a lot of thought, investigation and research on our part.

If you recall, I raised another question about the description of the wheel of Dharma. One scholar said a wheel of Dharma is that which fits the metaphor of the wheel of the Chakravatin king. If that is the case, then we can argue that we can find the metaphor of 'the wheel' in Haribhadra's *Commentary Clarifying the Meaning*. However, we cannot call that text a wheel of Dharma, because then we end up with the position that the author of the text is a buddha. Of course, this assumes that the authors of all the oral wheels of Dharma must be buddhas.

To overcome confusion and be clear about what is and isn't the word of a buddha, we must remember the definitions of *ka* (the Word of the Buddha) and *tenchoe* (treatises) as we have learned before.

### **The Questions of the King Dharantsvara Sutra**

As discussed before, the *Sutra Unravelling the Thought* explicitly mentions the wheel of Dharma, but the *Questions of the King Dharantsvara Sutra* and some scholars say that, although the term 'wheel of Dharma' is not explicitly mentioned, it is implied.

*Questions of the King Dharantsvara Sutra* reads:

Children of the noble family it is like this - an expert jeweller who knows how to recognise a gem will first obtain an unrefined gem from a known source of gems. Then they will soak it in pure salty water and brush it clean. He won't stop there because next he will soak it in pure food liquid and clean it with a soft woollen cloth. After that, he will further soak it in nourishing liquid and then clean and polish it with a very clean soft cotton cloth until all the stains are removed. The result is a lapis lazuli stone.

It is the same as the children of a noble family. Like the jeweller, tathagatas realise the predisposition of sentient beings who are obsessed with samsara. So, they turn the minds of these people away from samsara by giving discourses on impermanence, suffering, selflessness and impurities. In this way, beings are led into the ethical life of the noble Dharma.

The tathagatas don't just stop there. They then give a discourse on emptiness [entity], signlessness [cause] and wishlessness [effect] thereby helping sentient beings to realise the nature of the tathagata. But they don't even stop there; they give a discourse on the universal wheel qualified by three thoroughly purified circles leading diverse sentient beings into the state of tathagatas. Having entered the suchness of tathagatas, they become great peerless objects of veneration.

In this sutra, we find that just as an expert jeweller polishes a raw gem into an exquisite gem, in a similar fashion the tathagatas or buddhas understand the individual needs of sentient beings and they give discourses that help those beings reach their goal.

To further elaborate, this sutra uses the analogy of how an expert jeweller refines a raw gem into a precious gem.

First, he knows the areas where these gems are found. When they are found they are stained with mud and so forth. He soaks the gem in salty water and scrubs it with a coarse brush, such as a rough, hairy animal skin. So, the first step is to find and then clean the gem.

But that won't make a perfect gem. So, the jeweller soaks that gem in another medicinal liquid. After that, the material he uses to wipe it has to be a softer woollen cloth.

The sutra then says that he still won't be satisfied. So, the next stage is where he soaks it in a chemical like mercury, then wipes it down and polishes it using an even thinner and softer cotton cloth. Eventually, the raw gem turns into a prized gem such as lapis lazuli (*baidurya* in Sanskrit - precious jewel). This analogy is used to explain how tathagatas or buddhas lead sentient beings through the stages of the wheels of Dharma.

### **The three types of person**

The Buddha initially taught those of small mental scope how the aggregates of form and so forth are subject to momentary change. He taught these people the nature of suffering, which arises through the power of karma and mental afflictions and showed how a person lacks a self that is intrinsically independent. In this way, he taught how we have fallen into the pits of impurities. By giving these kinds of discourses, the buddhas or tathagatas are able to turn the minds of these sentient beings away from the worldly things they are attracted to and which obsess them. Such discourses have the effect of inducing in them a sense of renunciation and engagement with the precious three-fold trainings.

Giving discourses on impermanence, selflessness and on the failings of cyclic existence can help beings to overcome the attractions of samsara. Then they can be given teachings explaining how to practise the threefold trainings. The tathagatas never stop helping those beings in this first stage.

After that, tathagatas give a discourse to those of medium scope on the three doors of liberation - emptiness (entity), signlessness (cause) and wishlessness (effect) - in terms of the way cause and effect show how natural things lack true existence.

But the tathagatas don't stop there. They give a further discourse on great compassion and bodhicitta and all the teachings on vastness to sentient beings of great scope. In this way, beings are led into the Mahayana path and then when they transcend to the state of tathagata, they are called the peerless ones with great excellences.

The term 'wheel of Dharma' is explicitly mentioned in the *Sutra Unravelling the Thought* but not in the *Question of the King Dharantsvara Sutra*. Nevertheless, in the *Question of the King Dharantsvara Sutra*, the Buddha gave discourses on the three stages of the path through the gem analogy. Here we find how the Buddha guides sentient beings through three stages. The first stage is to ripen their continuum. Once their continuum has ripened, the next stage is to teach them the profound path of emptiness. Only then is there the teaching on the vast path.

This raises some questions about the order of these three stages. The first stage is to ripen the continuum. Next is the discourse on the profound path on emptiness, and the

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last or third stage is the vast path, which is the method with the discourse on topics such as cultivating bodhicitta. Since cultivating bodhicitta marks the entrance into the Mahayana path, for instance, the Mahayana path of accumulation, should the order of these last two stages be reversed? Should the third stage be taught before emptiness? This is the question raised here.

The reply is that there is no conflict. This is because the order of the three stages, as given here, is primarily with respect to the sequential order of the stage of the path of bodhisattvas of sharp mental faculties who realise emptiness prior to entering into the path. Therefore, the teaching on the stages of the profound path on emptiness is taught before the teaching of the stages of vast deeds on bodhicitta. Of course, this sequential order of the stage of the path is not right for bodhisattvas of dull mental faculties.

I intended to present the three knowers, which is the next topic, but there is not much time left, so I will present it next week. In the meantime, it would be good if you could prepare for the next teaching by learning the definition of the three knowers – knowers of bases, knowers of the path and knowers of exalted wisdom. After that, maybe you could give some thought as to whether these three knowers are mutually exclusive.

Just to add a bit more to Haribhadra's text *Clarifying the Meaning*. If you say it is not an oral wheel of Dharma because the author is not a buddha, you are implying that if it is an oral wheel of Dharma then the speaker or author must be also a buddha. In that case, I raise this issue: what about Shariputra's words in the *Heart Sutra*? Is that sutra an oral wheel of Dharma? If you say it is an oral wheel of Dharma, then you are saying Shariputra is a buddha.

We will leave it here. Thank you

Recommended reference: Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltzen's *The Eight Categories and Seventy Topics*, as translated by Jampa Gendun

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version*

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