
Ornament for Clear Realisation

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Tonight, we will begin the teaching on the precepts, which is the second of the ten dharmas (or topics) characterising the exalted-knower-of-all-aspects, the first topic being the mind generation of bodhicitta.

1.2. PRECEPTS

The topic of precepts is taught after mind generation to indicate that you must first receive the precepts and practise them in order to accomplish the omniscient mind of a buddha that you seek through the Mahayana mind generation.

In the root text of the *Ornament*, the following two verses introduce the topic of precepts:

I.21 *Concerning achieving, the truths,
The three jewels – Buddha and so forth,
Non-attachment, thorough non-wearying,
Thoroughly maintaining the paths,*

I.22 *The five eyes, the six qualities
Of clairvoyance, the path of seeing,
And meditation: guidances
Are to be known as having a nature of ten.*

Here, the term ‘guidances’ refers to ‘precepts’. The Tibetan term *dam-ngak* literally means guiding or instructional speech.

Suitable persons for receiving Mahayana precepts

Let us first ask: which persons, or type of life basis, are suitable for receiving Mahayana precepts? Suitable persons include those who have not entered the path, hearers, solitary realisers and bodhisattvas.

The *Knower of Path Sutra* says:

The celestial beings who have not cultivated the mind generation into the unsurpassed and perfect state of complete enlightenment, they should cultivate the mind generation into the unsurpassed and perfect state of complete enlightenment.

Thus, this sutra instructs that those who have not entered the path are suitable candidates to receive Mahayana precepts.

Suitable persons from whom one can receive Mahayana precepts

The next question concerns suitable persons from whom to receive Mahayana precepts: they can be buddhas, bodhisattvas, hearers, solitary realisers, and those who have not entered the path.

1.2.1. Definition [of Mahayana precepts]

The Mahayana precepts are defined as Mahayana speech that teaches a method for attaining the objects that a Mahayana mind generation strives for.

1.2.2. Divisions of the Mahayana precepts by way of entity

As to the divisions of the Mahayana precepts by way of entity there are two:

1.2.2.1. Precepts instructing on the Mahayana

Precepts instructing on the Mahayana are defined as Mahayana precepts instructed for the sake of increasing the positive qualities that you have already acquired.

1.2.2.1. Precepts of subsequent Mahayana teachings

Precepts of subsequent Mahayana teachings are defined as Mahayana precepts instructed for the sake of newly acquiring positive qualities that you haven’t acquired.

Analysing the meaning of Mahayana precepts

The Mahayana precepts encompass the collections of sutras, tantras and treatises or commentaries on them by later followers.

Based on the definition of Mahayana precepts just given, we need to find out how these scriptures qualify to be called Mahayana precepts.

For example, can we say that a Cittamatrīn sutra, which says that dependent phenomena and thoroughly established phenomena are truly existent, is a Mahayana precept? If so, can we have Mahayana precepts that contain wrong views? Although what is said in this sutra accords with the view of the Cittamatrīn school, and hence leads its followers along the path to complete enlightenment, it doesn’t reflect the way things actually are. The sutra says dependent phenomena and thoroughly established phenomena are truly existent; but that’s not the case, because everything lacks true existence. So, are we going to say we can have Mahayana precepts with incorrect and inconsistent ideas and views? This is a question for you to consider.

Another question that we can raise is related to the meaning of ‘Mahayana speech’, in the context of the definition above that says Mahayana precepts must be ‘Mahayana speech’. We found earlier that a suitable person from whom we can receive Mahayana precepts can be a buddha, a bodhisattva, a hearer, a solitary realiser and even someone who has not entered the path. Does this mean we can have ‘Mahayana speech’ from hearers or solitary realisers because we have taken Mahayana precepts from them? Likewise, can we have ‘Mahayana speech’ from those who have not entered the path? You must discuss exactly what ‘Mahayana speech’ means.

Obviously, the criterion for identifying words as ‘Mahayana speech’ is not whether the speaker is Mahayanist or not. The Word of the Buddha doesn’t have to be spoken by a buddha, because the Word of the Buddha can be spoken by a hearer, or even someone who hasn’t entered the path. When we studied the Buddha’s Word, we noted there is a Buddha’s Word by blessing, which doesn’t come from the Buddha’s mouth. For example, the dialogue between Shariputra and Avalokiteshvara in the *Heart Sutra* is a blessed Word of the Buddha.

1.2.3. Division of the Mahayana precepts by modes of instruction

Next is the division of Mahayana precepts by modes of instruction, of which there are ten.

1.2.3.1. Precepts which instruct on achievings, its own entity

The first one is called the precepts which instruct on achievings, its own entity. This is indicated by the words *concerning achieving* in the first line of verse I.21.

The word 'achieving' in Tibetan is *dup*. The first 'precept which instructs on achievings, its own entity' concerns the entity of spiritual achieving or spiritual accomplishment. Under this precept, one of the major topics is the two truths - the conventional and ultimate truths.

1.2.3.1.1. THE TWO TRUTHS

In Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen's *General Meaning*, we find seven headings under which we study the two truths: (1) the basis of divisions; (2) the enumerations; (3) the definition; (4) the etymology; (5) investigating one and many; (6) the advantages of learning; and (7) the disadvantages of not learning.

1. The **basis of divisions** is the objects of knowledge. In other words, the two truths are the division of the objects of knowledge.

2. The **enumeration** of all objects of knowledge into two truths is definitive, because it encompasses all the objects of knowledge. This is because there is no object of knowledge that is neither of the two truths. The *Meeting of Father and Son Sutra* says: 'the two truths of conventional and ultimate as known by Tathagatas are exhausted in the conventional truth and ultimate truth'.

3. The **definitions** of the two truths are:

Ultimate truth is defined as an object that is realised in a non-dualistic manner by a direct valid cognition that realises it. Non-dualistic appearance refers to not having any appearance of conventionality, of true existence, or of subject and object.

Ultimate truth can be further divided by way of the subjective basis of emptiness into twenty-five-fold emptiness, eighteen-fold emptiness, sixteen-fold emptiness, and so forth. These divisions are made on the grounds of the basis of emptiness, because as far as emptiness itself is concerned, it is the same with respect to any basis or object, in that emptiness is a non-affirming negative phenomenon of a mere absence of the object of negation.

Conventional truth is defined as an object realised in a dualistic manner by a direct valid cognition that realises it.

Relating to the two truths, Shantideva's text *A Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, says: 'there are two truths - conventional and ultimate. The ultimate is not the object of the (dualistic) mind, for the (dualistic) mind is regarded as conventional.' This quote summarises the division and meaning of the two truths.

4. **Etymologically**, conventional truth can be divided into two: real conventional truth and unreal conventional truth.

A **real conventional truth** can be defined as a conventional truth that cannot be realised by a worldly person in accordance with its appearance to the mind to which it is an appearing object. An example is a visual form that is an appearing object of an eye-sense consciousness, which perceives it as if the form has true existence. However, the form does not have true existence. The worldly or ordinary person cannot realise the gap between the way the form appears to the mind and the way it is, but they apprehend the form as truly existent in the way it appears to the mind. Hence, the form is a real conventional truth, in the sense it is real to the conventional being.

Likewise, space is a real conventional truth. Space appears to have true existence to a conceptual thought apprehending the

space, although it doesn't exist truly. The worldly being, however, holds on to space as having true existence, as space appears that way to the thought apprehending it.

An **unreal conventional truth** can be defined as that which is either a real or unreal conventional truth and can be realised by a worldly person in accordance with its appearance to the mind to which it is an appearing object, or it is untenable to valid cognition for it to exist conventionally or nominally. An example is the reflection of a form in a mirror, which a worldly being can realise is not a real form. Hence, a conventional truth that a worldly being can realise as being unreal or false is called an unreal conventional truth.

We might leave tonight's teaching here before we get more confused!

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Edited Version

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