
Ornament for Clear Realisation

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We have been discussing the ten topics of the Dharma that characterise the exalted-knower-of-all-aspects. We have finished the first topic which is mind generation or bodhicitta. We are now beginning the second topic, which is Precepts.

1.2. PRECEPTS

1.2.1. DEFINITION

So far, we have learnt why this topic is presented after bodhicitta or mind generation, and then we talked about the meaning or definition of precepts, the divisions of precepts and so on. As we learnt last week:

The definition of Mahayana precepts is the Mahayana speech that teaches a method for attaining the objects that a Mahayana mind generation strives for.

If we include the words ‘it is an unmistakable or correct Mahayana speech ...’ to this definition of Mahayana precepts, then the question that arises is: Are the sutras, such as the one presenting the Cittamatrīn view that dependent and ultimate or thoroughly established phenomena are truly existent, Mahayana precepts? If yes, how can it be a correct Mahayana speech because what it presents does align with the Cittamatrīn view but not with the way things are – which is that everything is lacking true existence. On the other hand, how can we have a sutra that is incorrect or mistaken speech?

The other question relates to the part of the definition saying, ‘precepts is a Mahayana speech’. How can those Mahayana sutras, such as those which are spoken words of hearers and solitary realisers (who are not Mahayanists), be regarded as Mahayana speech?

The reason the topic of precepts is presented after mind generation is because the Mahayana precepts *teach a method for attaining the objects that a Mahayana mind generation strives for*. The next question is: What Mahayana precepts or instructions need to be received to attain the goal of mind generation? The text lists ten types of precepts. Of these ten, we talked about the first one - the Precepts which Instruct on Achieving its own Entity - in the last teaching.

1.2.3.1. Precepts which instruct on achieving its own entity

This topic covers the two truths, which we defined last week, and tonight we will continue with this topic.

The two truths

First, the two truths are ultimate truth and conventional truth.

The definition of ultimate truth is ‘an object that is realised in a non-dualistic manner by a direct valid cognition that realises it’.

The definition of conventional truth is ‘an object realised in a dualistic manner by a direct valid cognition that realises it’.

In these definitions we find the words *a direct valid cognition that realises it*, which refers to a specific direct valid cognition with respect to each object that it realises. Generally speaking, we can have different direct cognitions or cognisers that realise both truths. For example, an eye sense consciousness of a buddha is a direct sense valid cognition that realises both truths and, in fact, all phenomena. So, it does not refer to a direct cognition in the context of the definitions of the two truths.

If we consider subtle objects such as emptiness, impermanence and so on, the direct valid cognition that realises them must be a mental direct cognition rather than a sensory direct valid cognition. On the other hand, the direct valid cognition that realises coarse objects, such as a pot, is a sensory direct valid cognition.

In the case of a pot, the direct valid cognition that realises the pot is an eye sense direct valid cognition. Since a pot is a conventional truth, an eye sense direct valid cognition realises it in a dualistic manner. The meaning of ‘in a dualistic manner’ means having a dualistic appearance which includes the appearances of true existence, conventional or nominal object, and the appearance of the subject and the object as being of a separate substance. Regarding the eye sense direct valid cognition that realises a pot, there is a dualistic appearance in terms of having an appearance of the pot which is a conventionality, and the appearance of the subject and the object as being a separate substance.

If you take an example of emptiness, which is an *ultimate truth*, a direct valid cognition that realises emptiness is, as we have said before, a mental direct valid cognition that realises emptiness. This mental cognition realises emptiness in a non-dualistic manner. Other than the appearance of emptiness, nothing else appears. Let us say the emptiness of a pot is an ultimate truth because the direct valid cognition realises it in a non-dualistic manner, meaning without any dualistic appearances as stated above. It does not even have the appearance of a pot. All the appearances have subsided except for the emptiness or suchness of the pot.

We should note here that when we talk about an object realised in a non-dualistic manner, we are talking about a direct valid cognition, not a conceptual thought. For example, we can have a conceptual thought that realises emptiness, however, it realises it in a dualistic manner, because it would have the appearance of true existence, the appearance of a mental image of emptiness etc.

4. Etymology¹

With regard to the etymological meaning of the two truths, why is one called conventional truth and the other ultimate truth? In Tibetan, they are called *kunzob denpa* and *dondam denpa* respectively. The term ‘conventional’ or

¹ The first three are: the basis of divisions; the enumerations and the definition.

kunzob has several connotations such as false, concealing, obscured or obstructive, whereas the ultimate or *dondam* connotes true, ultimate, real and actual. Etymologically these refer to the mind that realises the two truths. A pot is called a conventional truth because the direct valid cogniser that cognises it is conventional or nominal in the sense of being false, concealing and obscured, and the emptiness of a pot is called an ultimate truth because the direct valid cogniser that cognises it is ultimate in the sense of being true, actual and ultimate.

5. Investigating one or different

Here we investigate whether the two truths are one or different (*chig dang ta-de* in Tibetan). We can talk of one or different in terms of the substance (*ze* in Tibetan), of the entity (*ngo-wo* in Tibetan), the nature (*rang-shin* in Tibetan), the meaning (*don* in Tibetan), and in terms of the isolate or reverse (*dok-pa* in Tibetan). So, one and different can be understood from several different points of view. Of all these different ways of knowing one and different, we say that the two truths are different by entity, but they are one by the reverse or the isolate. Take a pot and its emptiness as an example. They are one in terms of the entity and to indicate this the *Heart Sutra* states, 'Form is emptiness, emptiness is form'. A pot and its emptiness are one by entity because when you search for the entity of the pot then you cannot find it other than its emptiness; nor can you find the entity of the pot's emptiness other than the pot itself.

The two truths are not one in terms of the reverse or the isolate

However, they are not the same, they are different in terms of the reverse or the isolate. In other words, it means they are not one. If the emptiness of a pot and its emptiness is one, then there are many logical absurdities that will arise.

- Just as the pot is an object of the direct valid eye sense consciousness directly realising it, so should the emptiness of true existence of the pot be directly realised. This means that the direct valid eye sense consciousness directly realising the pot should also directly realise its emptiness.
- Just as the pot can serve as a cause to arouse mental afflictions so should the emptiness of the pot. Moreover, if they are one, then it would be sufficient just to understand the pot in order to understand the emptiness of the pot. In which case, there would be no point in meditating on the emptiness of the pot.
- Just as a pot can come in different colours, shapes and so on, the emptiness of the pot should also come with different colours, shapes and so forth.

This explains why the pot and the emptiness of the pot are not one but different, which is to say that they are different or separate in terms of the reverse or the isolate. If the two objects share the same reverse or isolate, then they must be literally one.

Two truths are one in terms of entity (*ngo-wo* in Tibetan)

Since there are so many logical inconsistencies in saying, for example, the pot and its emptiness are one in terms of the reverse, the conclusion is that they are not one.

Nevertheless, we say that they are one in terms of their entity, otherwise they would be two completely unrelated things. If they were to be two unrelated objects, then the consequence would be that the valid cognition that realises the emptiness of the pot cannot oppose the conception that grasps at the true existence of the pot.

6. Next, we move on to the **advantages of understanding** the two truths. Understanding the two truths is equivalent to understanding all the objects of knowledge, in particular, understanding the teachings of the Lord Buddha. Through your knowledge of the two truths, you overcome ignorance or confusion relating to the Buddha's teachings. Understanding the two truths is also a way to accumulate both merit and wisdom. Chandrakirti's text *Supplement to the Middle Way* sums up the benefits of understanding the two truths.

Like the king of swans, ahead of lesser birds they
soar,
On broad wide wings of relative and ultimate full
spread.
And on the strength of virtue's mighty wings, they fly
To gain the far and supreme shore, the oceanic
qualities of victory.

This metaphor of the two wings of a bird is used to indicate the significance of these two truths. Just as a bird with two wings can soar high in the sky and reach distant lands, one can reach the other side or the state of enlightenment when endowed with the realisation of the two truths.

7. If we **lack the knowledge** of the two truths, then we will be subject to suffering. All the suffering that we find in this worldly existence is rooted in our extreme wrong view of existence and non-existence, viewing existence as non-existence and non-existence as existence. These extreme views stem from ignorance of the two truths. We perpetually suffer because of attachment and hatred. If we investigate the cause, we will find that the main cause is our misconception of the way things exist in reality. Because of this misconception, we generate attachment and hatred towards things and events.

Chandrakirti's *Supplement to the Middle Way* says, 'Those who do not know the distinction between two truths enter the wrong path of misconception'. This line points out how all our confusion and misconceptions are related to our lack of knowledge of the two truths. The *Sutra Instructing Katyayana* says, 'Oh Katyayana! The reason why most beings in this world are not liberated and are subject to birth, ageing, sickness, death, sorrow, weeping, misery, anguish, and conflict is because they grasp at the extremes of existence and non-existence.'

Then there is the statement by acharya Bhavaviveka in his *Essence of the Middle Way*, where he says, 'It is not the way of the wise person to climb into a real house without using the real stairs of conventional truth'. This also points out the benefit of realising the two truths.

With this brief explanation of the two truths let us say we have finished the first precept Instructions on Achieving its Own Entity, which is about the two truths.

I.2.3.2. Precepts which instruct on the object of observation, the four truths

The second precept gives instructions on the object of observation, the four truths. You will find reference to it in the first line of verse I21.

I.21. Concerning achieving, the truths,

The word 'achieving' indicates the precepts that instruct on achieving its own entity, which is the first precept that we have just covered. The second precept is indicated by the words 'the truth', which is the precept that gives instructions on the object of observation, the four truths.

Having understood the meaning of the two truths, this precept presents instructions on the object of observation, the four truths. So, we must understand the four noble truths and then apply them to our practice.

The four noble truths, with which you are all familiar, are the noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the cause of suffering, the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and the noble truth of the path to cessation.

The four truths are normally described as the four noble truths. The reason for including the word 'noble' is to indicate that these four truths are true or factual as they have been realised and taught by noble beings. So, they are called truths in that sense. Putting these four into practice will lead to a state of liberation and complete enlightenment.

The scriptures explain that they are called the four noble or arya truths because the four include two objects to be eliminated and two objects to be realised. These are realised by superior or noble or arya beings, and as they accord with reality, they become the truth. That is why they are called the four arya or noble truths.

We will leave tonight's teaching here.

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