
Ornament for Clear Realisations

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Last week, we talked about the precepts that instruct on the three types of joyful effort - in non-clinging; in tireless effort; and in effort that thoroughly upholds the path. So, we have finished the first six of the ten Mahayana precepts.

I.2.3.7. Precepts which instruct on the five eyes

The seventh precept is the precept that instructs on the **five types of sublime eyes**: the flesh eye, divine eye, wisdom eye, Dharma eye, and Buddha eye.

I.2.3.8. Precepts which instruct on the six clairvoyances

The eighth precept instructs on the **six clairvoyances**: the clairvoyance of magical emanation, the clairvoyance of divine ear, the clairvoyance of knowing others' minds, the clairvoyance of remembering previous lives, the clairvoyance of divine eye, and the clairvoyance of the extinction of contaminations or defilements.

The seventh and eighth precepts relate to the first line and part of the second line of the root text verse, I.22, which reads:

*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.*

Benefits of cultivating the sublime eyes and clairvoyances

It's important to note that the five sublime eyes and six clairvoyant powers are stages of mental development that were not just invented by later masters. Rather, we find their source in the Buddha's own teachings.

If they are not conjoined with renunciation or bodhicitta, however, instead of being a cause to achieve liberation and complete enlightenment, they can serve as a cause to remain in samsara, and even fall into lower rebirths.

On the other hand, when conjoined with bodhicitta - the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings - these supernatural perceptions of the sublime eyes and clairvoyances will, for instance, assist bodhisattvas to become fully self-sufficient on their spiritual path and quickly achieve complete enlightenment. Having such supernatural qualities can also serve as a cause to inspire other beings to follow the path.

Each of the five sublime eyes offers tremendous benefit and serves a great purpose on the path.

For example, it is said that by actualising the first sublime eye - the **flesh eye** - you will have the power to perceive the right teachers or students with whom one has a special spiritual connection or bond, however far away they may be within the first one thousand worldly systems.

Likewise, with the second eye, the **divine eye**, you would have the benefit of knowing exactly what Dharma to teach different students or disciples and be able to see their future as a result. Likewise, you could also see what kind of consequence the students would face if you didn't teach them

the Dharma. So, this divine eye enables you to predict your teacher and know your students and their future.

The **wisdom eye** refers to the wisdom realising selflessness. This is indispensable for one to be able to lead other sentient beings to the state of liberation.

The **Dharma eye** gives one the ability to recognise the predisposition and mental faculties of disciples - whether they are sharp-minded or dull-minded - thus giving one the ability to teach the Dharma suited to their levels.

The fifth sublime eye is called the **Buddha eye**. It is said that even if you haven't cultivated the actual Buddha eye but have cultivated something approaching the Buddha eye, you will have a capacity to perceive almost all objects of knowledge. Because of this, you will have self-confidence and be self-sufficient in your practice, progressing on the path without needing to depend on help from others.

Buddha's life, his qualities and the Festival of Miracles

We all have faith that the Lord Buddha is a fully awakened being, possessing all excellent qualities, including the above-mentioned supernatural perceptions and powers.

It would be good for us to further explore these qualities by reflecting on the Buddha's life story. Is there any part of the Buddha's life that reveals these qualities? Yes - for example, we celebrate the first month of the Tibetan lunar calendar as the Month of Miracles, when the Buddha achieved a victory over non-Buddhist teachers through winning 'miracle competitions'. This victory is testimony to the Buddha's supernatural powers, such as the five sublime eyes and six clairvoyant powers, that we have been talking about.

The Festival of Miracles is remembered as one of the four major Buddhist festivals in Tibet - the other three are Sagadawa (Vesak) in the fourth month; the Turning of the Wheel of Dharma on the 4th day of the sixth month; and the Buddha's descent from heaven in the ninth month. The main day of the Festival of Miracles month is the 15th, although the Buddha's display of miracles occurred from the 1st to the 15th of the first month.

Regarding the story of the miracle competitions, after the Buddha became enlightened and began teaching, he became famous. A large group of people started following him, including many well-known kings. This made many non-Buddhists, including six famous non-Buddhist teachers or *tirthikas*, jealous. These *tirthikas* proposed to the king that they would challenge the Lord Buddha. So, the king organised a challenge between the Buddha and the *tirthikas*, which lasted from the 1st to the 15th day of the first month of the lunar calendar. Each day, the Buddha defeated them by manifesting a different miracle, and on the 15th day, the *tirthikas* were completely defeated.

To highlight the significance of the Buddha's legacy, we find that among the four major deeds of Je Tsongkhapa was that of founding the Great Prayer Festival, which commemorates the month of the Buddha's manifestation of miracles. During this month in Tibet, especially at full moon, the monasteries create large offerings of tormas - specially designed butter sculptures with fine artwork depicting the various precious objects. All the monks and nuns are busy attending these prayer ceremonies.

The festival also attracts a large gathering of lay people to the temples and monasteries, because whatever merits and virtues one accumulates will increase during that time. We

have a saying in Tibetan, 'Forget about seeing the fifteenth sculpture; it is best just take care of yourself!' This phrase refers to the fact that the crowd that gathers to view the fifteenth sculpture is always too big, so if don't look after yourself, you may get squashed by the crowd!

Lama Tsongkhapa's prayer called *Destiny Fulfilled: A song revealing self-realisation* says, 'To gather a great store [of merit and wisdom] with little effort, rejoicing in virtue is praised as best'. Rejoicing is a practice that requires very little effort yet accumulates great merit. Therefore, when we think of the life and all the qualities of the Buddha and other noble beings, or see other devotees engaging in virtue, we must rejoice in their virtue and cultivate a sense of admiration. In this way, we can accumulate a great amount of merit very easily.

If we regard ourselves as Buddhist – as someone who expresses devotion or faith in the Buddha – it would be expected of us to know the Buddha's life story. Knowing the Buddha's life story will help us remember the Buddha's excellent qualities and inspire us to follow him. If we don't understand the full details of all the Lord Buddha's deeds, at least we should try to understand and acknowledge some of his major deeds so that we can engage in the practice of rejoicing in his deeds. Further, when we come across anyone who may know that we are Buddhist and asks us about the Buddha and his teachings, we will be able to provide the right information. Not being able to tell them who the Buddha is would be a bit embarrassing, wouldn't it?!

Now we will now go through the five types of sublime eyes one by one.

1.2.3.7. Precepts that instruct on the five sublime eyes: eye of flesh, divine eye, eye of wisdom, eye of Dharma and eye of Buddha

Meaning of 'sublime eye'

Firstly, we must define a sublime eye or in Tibetan *chen* which is the honorific sublime and the colloquial *mik* for eye. The definition of *chen* or sublime eye is in accordance with the Sera-je monastery text, *The General Meaning of Paramita*, by Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltzen. This text summarises the subject matter of paramita. It says:

The sublime eye is a knower which directly perceives its object, and belonging to a distinguished class, it arises from its empowering condition of the level of actual concentration.

We can break up this definition into two main parts. First, it says a *knower which directly perceives its object*; the other main part is *arising (or produced) from its empowering condition of the level of actual concentration.*

Here, *knower* means a consciousness or mind that directly perceives its object, which should be clear to us. But the second part of the definition – *arising from its empowering condition of the level of actual concentration* – is a little more complicated. It is referring to the level of actual concentration as an empowering condition for this mind, this knower – the sublime eye – to arise. For this part of the definition, we need to have some background knowledge about the *empowering condition*, especially about *the level of actual concentration* being a higher level mental state above the desire realm.

The level of actual concentration

Now, to understand this, we need to understand the mental states of the three realms or three levels of existence – desire realm, form realm and formless realm.

The **desire realm** comprises the six levels of existence of rebirth, which are the three higher rebirths of godly beings, demigods and humans; and the three lower rebirths of animals, pretas and hell-beings. Above that, the **form realm** comprises seventeen levels of existence, while the **formless realm** has four levels of existence.

To achieve the **level of actual concentration**, we must first attain the calm abiding or *shamatha* state of meditation. By utilising the *shamatha* or calm abiding meditation, we can recognise increasingly subtle levels of existence in proceeding from the desire realm and the levels of form realm up to the top level of the formless realm. In other words, each subordinate level is coarser compared to the level above it.

If we compare the status of a desire realm being to a being in the form realm, a desire realm life is coarser, in that the lifespan of the desire realm being is shorter and there are more diseases and apparent experience of suffering; also, the mind of the desire realm beings is grosser, in terms of being afflicted with more defilements. So, compared with the form realm, we can observe that the desire realm has more shortcomings and faults.

This gives us some idea of the comparative state of beings on the three levels.

Now, to achieve the level of actual concentration, that is the mental level beyond the desire realm, we must have calm abiding, a perfect state of single pointedness. By utilising calm abiding or shamatha meditation, we need to observe and realise the desire realm as being coarse in comparison with the level above that, which is the first level of concentration of the form realm, which is subtle.

Likewise, to go higher, we need to observe the first level of concentration as being coarse and the level above that – which is the second level of concentration – as subtle, and so on and so forth, right to the top of the formless realm or the peak of cyclic existence. This culminates in giving rise to the thought of seeking a higher level of peace and bliss, and leaving the lower levels, which are not so peaceful and blissful.

So, by counteracting the faults of the desire realm through meditation, we can transcend to the level of actual concentration, such as the first level of actual concentration, which offers tremendous peace and bliss, a deep experience of peace and bliss that just doesn't exist within the plane of the desire realm.

It is said there have been some meditators who mistook that first experience of the peace and bliss of the first level of concentration for the attainment of liberation. There is a story about a meditator who mistook it for liberation and then remained in that state of meditative equipoise for a great many years. When he arose from it, his hair had grown very long. Noticing that some mice were living in his hair and had eaten it, he became angry! Upon this he realised that he had not reached nirvana or liberation. He then began to doubt the authenticity of his gurus. Even worse, he began to generate wrong views, such as that there is no such thing as liberation or nirvana. As a result of holding such wrong views, he was born in a lower rebirth in next life.

Some other meditators, after gaining the first level of concentration, utilised it to develop further qualities and realisations, and gained clairvoyant powers, such as that of remembering previous lives. There is another story about a

meditator who achieved the power of remembering previous lives but it was limited to seeing only his own immediate preceding life. Through this power, he saw that in his immediate former life, he was an owl. Because he went from being an owl to being reborn as a human, he concluded that you must have to be an owl to come back as a human! So, with a hope to become an owl, he went into the forest and started to imitate an owl, making hooting owl sounds, and so on.

From this, we can understand that we can reach the level of actual concentration – for example, the first level of actual concentration – by renouncing and eliminating the faults of the desire realm. However, here, the word ‘elimination’ doesn’t mean eliminating the root cause, as the person who has attained this level concentration may still remain in the desire realm. Rather, here, ‘elimination’ refers to the elimination of the manifest desire realm defilements. For instance, the person who has achieved this level of actual concentration has no direct, obvious or manifest attachment to the desire realm, even though they have not overcome the root cause of the desire realm.

So the first level of actual concentration is a virtue that can serve as a cause to cultivate the sublime eye.

Now we will go back to the definition of a sublime eye – *a knower which directly perceives its object*. This indicates that a sublime eye is a consciousness that directly perceives or cognises its object(s). And what causes this knower to arise is its *empowering condition of the level of actual concentration*. Without knowing the definition of the sublime eye, we won’t fully understand the definitions of the five types of sublime eyes.

In the definition of sublime eye here, I have briefly explained the term *the level of actual concentration*. We will come back to this in a later section of *Abhisamayalamkara*.

The five types of sublime eyes

As noted, there are five types of sublime eyes: the flesh eye, divine eye, wisdom eye, Dharma eye and Buddha eye.

Flesh eye

Firstly, we will read out the statement of definition of the flesh eye:

A flesh eye is a sublime eye and a knower which directly perceives the gross and subtle forms within the area of one hundred paktse or yojanas by depending on its own uncommon empowering condition of the (causal) flesh eye.

Let me first explain some technical terms that are used in the definition. The definition says that the flesh eye has the capability of directly perceiving gross and subtle forms that exist within the area one hundred *paktse*. The word *paktse* is a Tibetan word or *yojana* in Sanskrit, which historically was a form of measuring distance. The Tibetan word *gyandak* is another term used for measurement. One *gyandak* is equivalent to five hundred full arms’ lengths of a mature person. One *paktse* equals eight *gyandak* or four thousand full arm-lengths of a mature person. Now you have an idea of how far distant the flesh eye can directly perceive gross and subtle forms.

Q&A

Does anyone have a question?

Question: I was just wondering what the ‘subtle form’ is.

According to Madhyamaka Buddhist theory, there is **no partless particle** – this means that even the subtlest microscopic form that cannot be seen with the naked eye has parts. Having said that, there are some Buddhist schools that assert the view of a partless particle. But the Madhyamaka, which is the highest Buddhist school, rejects the existence of a partless particle, and asserts that even the subtlest particle must have dimensions.

We normally think of an eye in terms of visual eyesight. However, the five sublime eyes here are not about physical eyesight, but are higher states of mental consciousness that can be cultivated through developing meditative contemplation and concentration. When we talk about improving one’s eyesight or eye sense consciousness, we are not talking about something we can achieve and improve through the force of meditation. Our vision depends more on the health of the eye organ and the position or features of the visual object.

So, the sublime eye is not referring to an eye sense consciousness, but a level of mental consciousness developed through meditation.

We would normally say the physical eye of a sentient being has no capacity to directly perceive a subtle form. It’s also important to understand that the subtle form that is a direct object of perception of the flesh eye does not necessarily refer to the *subtlest* form. Here, we are talking about the flesh eye that can directly perceive a subtle form. Even non-Buddhist practitioners can accomplish this eye. But to directly perceive or cognise the *subtlest* form, you have to be a superior being or an arya. Hence, when we talk about a subtle form, the **level of subtlety is relative**; it can vary.

Another point of discussion relates to the **extent of the perception of the object of the flesh eye**, in terms of its numbers, types and features. The definition simply stipulates an ability to perceive the subtle form within the range of one hundred *paktse*. It doesn’t imply how many, or what specific objects, can be perceived. It is not necessarily saying the flesh eye sees *all* subtle forms within its range of perception.

The implication here is that the flesh eye has the capability to directly perceive gross and subtle forms within its range, just as a visual object can be perceived by eyesight. For example, from here I can see that door, but that doesn’t mean I see the details of the door. Maybe a better example is that I can say I see your hair, but if you ask me whether I see one particular hair, I will say I am not sure.

We will stop here for tonight.

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