
Ornament for Clear Realisations

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Twenty types of Sangha

Of the eight chapters of *Abhisamayalamkara*, or *The Ornament for Clear Realisations*, the first concerns the exalted knower of all aspects, which is presented under ten topics that characterise the exalted knower of all aspects or an omniscient mind. We have finished the first two of these ten topics, Mind Generation or bodhicitta and Precepts. The third topic is The Four Branches of Definite Discrimination. However, in accordance with the root text, the topic of the twenty types of Sangha is presented under the Precepts topic. The root text reads:

- I.23 Dull and sharp faculties,
By faith and attained by seeing, from lineage to lineage,
One intervening, intermediate, upon birth,
With and without exertion, three flying to the highest land,
- I.24 Going to the finality of the peak of cyclic existence,
Conquering desire for form, peace in the life of seeing,
Manifesting the corpus,
Rhinoceros – the twenty.

This topic is an extension of the Precept Which Instructs on the Three Objects of Refuge, more specifically the Sangha Jewel. There is this further explanation because the topic of the Sangha Jewel is so vast and difficult to comprehend.

The Ornament for Clear Realisations is a Mahayana scripture and presents the Mahayana path and Dharma. The Sangha Jewel in this text refers to Mahayana arya beings. Yet the twenty types of sangha as presented use terms and titles that refer to the Hinayana Sangha. However, this doesn't matter as the whole presentation mainly implies the Mahayana Sangha.

The presentation lists twenty types of Sangha, such as the Sangha of shravakas or the Hearer Vehicle, called stream enterers, once returners, non-returners and foe destroyers. Nevertheless, the main focus is the inner realisations of the Mahayana arya beings which run in parallel with the realisations of the of the shravaka Sangha.

The sutras list forty-eight types of sangha, and *The Ornament for Clear Realisations* simplifies it into twenty. We learn about the realisations of the shravaka Sangha so we can recognise the stages of the inner realisations of the Mahayana arya beings. Going into details of each one of the twenty types of sangha would involve a lot of study and may confuse us. Therefore, we will only focus on the eight types of sangha that are subsumed under the twenty types of Sangha.

What are the eight types of sangha called? We find two sets of four: the first set are called 'the four approachers' and the other set is called 'the four abiders'. So the eight are:

Approacher to stream enterer	Abider in the fruit of stream enterer
Approacher to once returner	Abider in the fruit of once returner
Approacher to never returner	Abider in the fruit of never returner
Approacher to foe destroyer	Abider in the fruit of foe destroyer

Before we delve into the differences between each of the eight, we need to understand the objects to be abandoned and how they are abandoned. This understanding will shed light on the attainment of the respective types of sangha. The object to be abandoned can be abandoned either gradually or simultaneously.

Objects to be abandoned and the manner of abandoning them, sequentially or simultaneously

Let's say we have a person whose goal is to achieve the liberation or the status of foe destroyer or arhat. To reach that they must follow the shravaka path and overcome all the respective objects of abandonment or obstructions to liberation. The objects of abandonment include the nine objects to be abandoned with respect to each of the three realms. So, there are nine objects of abandonment in the desire realm, nine in the form realm and nine in the formless realm. I listed the nine in the preceding teaching as the biggest of the big, the medium of the big, and the smallest of the big; the biggest of the middle, the medium of the middle, and the smallest of the middle; the biggest of the small, the medium of the small and the smallest of the small.

Abandoning objects gradually or sequentially

So, when we talk about abandoning what is to be abandoned in a gradual way, it means that you abandon the objects to be abandoned in each of the three realms in a sequential, progressive, and gradual manner, beginning with the desire realm.

To go into more detail we need to consider a further nine levels of objects to be abandoned within each of the three realms. For example, the form realm has four levels which are called the first concentration, the second concentration, the third concentration and the fourth concentration and each of these have a further nine subdivisions. Likewise, each of the formless realm subdivisions are divided into four levels called infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and the peak of cyclic existence and each of these can have nine levels of the objects to be abandoned. Those who get rid of the objects of abandonment in a gradual or sequential order will begin with the first of the desire realm through to the last one of the formless realm, progressively and in a sequential order, one by one.

Abandoning together or simultaneously

This means you don't abandon all the objects to be abandoned in the order of the three realms and the sub-

levels within them. In terms of the five paths, entering the path of seeing, the first of which is called the uninterrupted path of seeing, we are equipped with the capacity to directly counteract the object to be abandoned. In the case of someone who is abandoning it simultaneously, the first uninterrupted path of seeing serves as an antidote to all the big objects to be abandoned of all the three realms simultaneously, rather than first abandoning all the desire realm objects to be abandoned in the order of the big, the medium and the small, and then abandoning those of the form and formless realm in a similar sequential manner.

Meaning of the abandonment

To achieve liberation from samsara we must eliminate all the objects to be abandoned with respect to the three realms, and we can abandon them gradually or simultaneously. We now need to look into the meaning of the word 'abandoning', when we say, 'abandoning the object to be abandoned'. What does it mean? It depends upon the type of the antidote or path that counteracts the object to be abandoned. From the point of view of the worldly path, 'abandoning' means to prevent the direct manifestation of the object of abandonment, rather than abandoning in the sense of eliminating the seed. For example, since those who have attained the five sublime eyes and the six clairvoyances have achieved the preparation level of concentration, we say they have abandoned the desire realm afflictions. However, they have not abandoned desire realm afflictions from their roots. What they have abandoned is only manifested desire realm afflictions, in the sense of the affliction manifesting within their continuum. As a benefit of this, they do not suffer from sicknesses, a short lifespan and so forth of the desire realm.

However, if the path that is employed to abandon is a super mundane path then 'abandoning' means uprooting or abandoning, together with the seed. So, here we are referring to some inner realisations when we talk about abandoning the nine objects of abandonment, because these realisations are the antidotes to the object to be abandoned, and how they are abandoned depends on whether the realisation or the path is mundane or super mundane.

Approacher to stream enterer

Of the eight types of sangha, the first two are the approacher to stream enterer and the abider in the fruit of stream enterer.

The approacher to stream enterer is defined as:

One of the four approachers, who is continuously striving to achieve the fruit of the way of virtuous that is included in the type that is distinguished by having abandoned the three thorough entanglements to be abandoned by the path of seeing.

The approacher to stream enterer is someone who is very close to entering the path of release in the path of seeing. The path of release in the path of seeing is attained when one has abandoned the three thorough entanglements to be abandoned by the path of seeing. The approacher is one who has entered the uninterrupted path of the path of

seeing but who has not yet entered the path of release of the path of seeing. The person is however in the same period of meditative equipoise from the last leg of the path of preparation to the path of release of the path of seeing.

Three thorough entanglements to be abandoned by the path of seeing

The main object to be abandoned by the approacher to stream enterer includes what are called the three thorough entanglements (*thong-pang kunjor sum* in Tibetan): the imputed view of the transitory collection; viewing bad ethical discipline and bad practices as being the best ethics and practice; and afflictive doubt. Upon the full abandonment of the three thorough entanglements, the approachers to stream enterer are called the abiders in the fruit of stream enterer. There are many types of objects to be abandoned by the path of seeing. These three are singled out as the objects to be abandoned because they are the main afflictions and obstructions to achieving liberation.

The **first entanglement** is the imputed or intellectually acquired wrong view of the transitory collection. This refers to a view of a self which exists independently and self-sufficiently, giving a notion of the self being like a king and the other aggregates - form, feeling and so forth - being his subjects. Another example is that the self is like an owner and the aggregates are owned by it. Some non-Buddhist schools posit this view of an eternal self or I. If the self were to be eternal then the idea of birth, death and rebirth is untenable. That would mean that the person cannot exist as there is no birth, no rebirth, death and so on. Holding on to such a conception of an 'I' severely obstructs one from achieving liberation.

The **second entanglement** is the wrong view of holding some bad moralities and practices as the supreme path leading to liberation. This view misleads us into engaging in wrong practices. For instance, there is a non-Buddhist belief which states that salvation or liberation can be achieved by using our five fingers as wicks to offer light. This is not the case; therefore abandoning the second entanglement avoids the wrong path.

The **third entanglement** is a doubt. This must be avoided, otherwise, even if you have found the right path, you will not follow it. So, this entanglement discourages you from following the right path.

When we talk about an approacher to stream enterer and an abider in the fruit of stream enterer, we are talking about those on the shravaka path. Approachers are those shravakas on the path who are continuously striving to counteract the three entanglements. More specifically, it refers to those in the meditative equipoise moving from the last leg of the path of preparation to the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing. Abiders in the fruit of stream enterer refers to those on the path of release on the path of seeing who have abandoned the three entanglements to be abandoned by the path of seeing.

Be diligent and joyful in studying

If you are confused by all the new Dharma jargon, please don't worry too much. You will have the opportunity to learn more about these terms later on. But for those of you who have been attending the teachings and who are getting used to the topics that we have covered so far, this topic on the twenty types of Sangha is not so complex. You will find it very handy even to hear and know a bit about the various topics mentioned in Buddhist literature. Next time when you read Dharma books or listen to the teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama or other lamas, coming across words such as 'approachers' and 'abiders' will have some meaning for you. At least you will be able to say to yourself, 'I have heard these before'. You don't want to stress about what you are learning; you must enjoy it regardless of your progress. You must, however, be consistent and diligent in your effort in studying. If you persist with your learning, then eventually you will come to understand.

We should think that we are extremely fortunate to study and to even just hear about this precious text, *The Ornament for Clear Realisations*, by Maitreya. As much as possible, we should maintain a positive and joyful state of mind when engaging in learning and practising the Dharma. I consider myself very fortunate to have this opportunity to teach on *The Ornament for Clear Realisations*. As I enjoy teaching and doing my best with it, I am always thinking of how I can teach better and make my presentation more concise, simpler and clearer. Geshe Doga advises me to teach primarily based on the root text and make sure I finish the whole text. We will leave it here. Thanks.

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Edited Version*

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