
Ornament for Clear Realisations

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The true blessing is the Buddha's speech

As you know, we have been studying *The Ornament for Clear Realisations*. Written by the Lord Maitreya, this text is a commentary on the Lord Buddha's Prajnaparamita sutras called *The Three of extensive, middling and short length Mothers* (*Yum gye-ding-du sum* in Tibetan) or the Prajnaparamita sutras in a hundred thousand lines, in twenty thousand lines and eight thousand lines.

The Lord Buddha was once exactly like us – an ordinary sentient being caught in samsara or cyclic existence. Even though we wish for happiness and want to avoid suffering we are not able to fulfil our wishes because of confusion and ignorance. The Buddha, however, realised that the root cause of all suffering is the self-cherishing mind, while the source of all goodness and happiness is the altruistic mind that cherishes other beings. So, he worked on developing love and compassion for all sentient beings and engaged in the bodhisattva deeds of benefiting all other sentient beings.

In his final life, he was born into this world as a prince, but he was never attracted to the princely hallmarks of material comfort and crowds of admirers and attendants. Despite his royal life with all the glories and excellences of the world, he felt a sense of dissatisfaction with his worldly life, because it was not giving him what he was looking for inside and not eliminating his suffering, or the suffering of the world. So, the Buddha completely renounced this life.

He went into solitude in a forest, in search of a way to find everlasting happiness and to uproot the cause of suffering, not only for himself but also for the sake of all other sentient beings. He undertook a rigorous and deep meditation and, in the end, reached the fully awakened state of buddhahood. Then, thinking about the most effective way to reach out to the world to benefit other sentient beings, he realised that the best way would be to share his knowledge and experience with others. Thus, he turned the three wheels of Dharma, through which he benefitted an infinite number of sentient beings.

Study and practice must go hand in hand

The Buddha cannot rescue all beings from suffering and place them in a state of happiness simply by bestowing some kind of blessing. It is wrong to think that if we pray to the Buddha, we will automatically be free from suffering, with all our wishes fulfilled. The Buddha himself made it very clear that if we want to reach an awakened state then we must follow the same path and practices that he followed.

This is what the teaching of the Buddha is all about. We need to recognise that the source of all happiness, protection and refuge for ourselves and other beings is cultivating love and compassion. So, if we want personal happiness or to give happiness to others, we must cultivate love and compassion for other beings. Simply gaining an understanding of the

Dharma will not take us to the state of buddhahood. We must try to tap into love, compassion and wisdom, qualities that already exist within us but which we need to develop and perfect.

So, it is our practice that benefits us and others now, and in the future. To practise effectively and correctly, we must learn the Dharma, and that is why we are here.

Example and meaning types of Sangha

The current topic is the extension of the precept that instructs on the Mahayana achieving's basis, the Three Jewels, specifically the Sangha Jewel. On the surface, we find the **example type of Sangha** (*pe-yi gendun* in Tibetan) or the similitude Sangha, for example, the twenty types of Sangha of the Shravaka or Hearer Vehicle that we are studying. But, the indicative or the **meaning type of Sangha**, (*don-gi Gendun* in Tibetan) refers to the Mahayana Sangha or the Sangha of Great Vehicle. This is the main subject of this presentation.

In the last teaching, we talked about the types of Sangha called returners and non-returners and stream enterers and so forth. To understand the difference between them, we have to understand the different types of mental afflictions. We talk about these mental afflictions in terms of the mental afflictions of the three realms – the desire, form and formless realms. Of these three, here we are mainly talking about the nine mental afflictions of the desire realm.

So, the question that arises is: why is this distinction between types of Sangha made on the basis of the afflictions of the desire realm? The first reason is that of all the mental afflictions, those of the desire realm are the ones with the most shortcomings.

Example and meaning approachers to stream enterer

The example types of Sangha of the Shravaka include approachers to stream enterers and abiders in the fruit of stream enterers, approachers to returners and abiders in the fruit of returners and so forth.

The corresponding meaning Sangha to the approachers to stream enterer is the Mahayana superior being or the Mahayana arya who is on the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing – there is some similarity between the two.

Example and meaning abiders in the fruit of stream enterer

The next type, the shravaka enterer in the fruit of the stream enterer, is an example Sangha. The related meaning Sangha is a Mahayana superior being or the arya on the path of release of the path of seeing.

Example and meaning approachers to returner

The third type of shravaka example Sangha is the approacher to returner. The parallel, the Mahayana meaning Sangha, is the Mahayana arya who is on the path of uninterrupted of the path of meditation, which is an antidote to the six of the nine levels of objects to be abandoned by the path of meditation.

Example and meaning abider in the fruit of returner

Next, we have the example Sangha of the abiders in the fruit of returners. The Mahayana parallel is the meaning Sangha of the Mahayana superior being on the path of release of the path of meditation, having just abandoned the six types of objects to be abandoned by the path of meditation. In other words, this bodhisattva reaches the seventh bodhisattva bhumi or ground.

Example and meaning approacher to never-returner

The next shravaka example type of Sangha is the approacher to never returner. The meaning Sangha which corresponds to this is the bodhisattvas who, having abandoned most of the objects to be abandoned by the path of meditation are now striving to abandon the eighth and ninth levels of the objects to be abandoned by the path of meditation.

Example and meaning abider in the fruit of a never-returner

After this comes the abider in the fruit of never returner. Here we find in the scriptures a range of types of abiders in the fruit of never returners, hence there is mention of the meaning Sangha with respect to each example abider in the fruit of never returner. However, the scriptures do not indicate the generic meaning Sangha for the abider in the fruit of never returner. From my perspective, in general terms a meaning Sangha to an abider in the fruit of never returner refers to those emanations of Buddha in this world or in other realms. Those can, in general, be called meaning Sangha of the abider in the fruit of never returners. In reality, these emanations are buddhas, but they appear as bodhisattvas or ordinary beings. Hence, I would say the meaning Sangha of the abider in the fruit of never-returner should be a buddha or a fully awakened being.

The example Sangha are differentiated on the basis of the number of mental afflictions to be abandoned. So, we have some Sangha who have abandoned some but not all the afflictions of the desire realm. We also have some Sangha who overcome mental afflictions serially, meaning stage by stage, and others who abandon them simultaneously. However, on the Mahayana path, according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika which is the basis of *Ornament*, the abandonment of both the obstructions to liberation and the obstructions to an omniscient mind occurs simultaneously, with the exception of those bodhisattvas who have attained the foe destroyer state of the lesser vehicle. Therefore, the meaning Sangha of the abiders in the fruit of never-returners must be buddhas.

Example and meaning approacher to foe destroyer

The next is the approacher to foe destroyer. The corresponding meaning Sangha is a bodhisattva of the tenth bhumi who is striving to abandon both the obstructions to liberation and the obstructions to an omniscient mind.

Example and meaning abider in the fruit of foe destroyer

The last type of example Sangha are the abiders in the fruit of foe destroyers. The corresponding meaning Sangha are bodhisattvas who have completely eliminated all the obstructions and become a buddha, as well as those buddhas who choose to remain on the tenth bodhisattva bhumi or manifest as a bodhisattva or manifest as a solitary realiser or pratyekabuddha in order to reach out to solitary realisers and other sentient beings. Some solitary realisers choose to abide in a place where there are no buddhas at all. So, to benefit them the buddhas manifest themselves as solitary realisers and teach those solitary realisers through physical gestures in silence.

Conclusion

That concludes the explanation of the twenty types of Sangha. Next, we will move to a discussion on the path of preparation. This is covered in the third topic of the chapter on exalted knowers of all aspects, which is called Four Branches of Definite Discrimination.

My teaching on the topic of the twenty Sangha is just a summary. It should provide you with a good basis to think over and go into in more detail later.

Student: What are the similarities between the example and the meaning Sangha?

That's a good question. First, we have to understand that this topic on the twenty Sangha comes from *The Ornament for Clear Realisations*, specifically the section on the Mahayana Three Jewels. However, the Mahayana Sangha Jewel is explained under the presentation of the twenty types of Sangha of the shravakas. These twenty shravaka Sangha are presented only as an example or symbolic Mahayana Sangha. So, we call the shravaka Sangha an example Sangha, and the Mahayana Sangha a meaning Sangha.

So, the question is: what are the similarities between the two? There are similarities in terms of the object to be abandoned and the kinds of realisation to be gained and the conduct of the two.

The first example Sangha, the approacher to stream enterer, is a shravaka who is on the path that is the direct remedy to the three objects to be abandoned by the path of seeing at an artificial level. Likewise, the first meaning Sangha is one who is on the Mahayana path of uninterrupted path of seeing which is a direct antidote to the artificial or imputed obstructions to liberation and the obstructions to omniscience. This doesn't mean that they are similar in all respects. For example, the first meaning Sangha abandons the artificial or imputed obstructions of both the obstructions to liberation and omniscient mind, while the first example Sangha abandons only the imputed afflictive obstruction. To some extent, we can draw similarities but even some senior monks find it difficult to understand if we go into greater depth.

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Edited Version*

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