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# Ornament for Clear Realisations

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Of the ten symbolising qualities of an exalted knower of all aspects, we have finished the first two, bodhicitta (Tib: *sem-kye*) and precepts (Tib: *dam-ngak*). Now we begin the third topic, The Four Branches of Definite Discrimination (Tib: *nge-je yenla-shi*).

Those of you who have not heard much about Buddhism before or who are not familiar with Buddhist teachings might find this topic a bit hard to understand. So, I suggest that you come to my Wednesday night sessions which are intended for a wider attendance.

In the past, I gave a brief explanation of the five Mahayana paths – the paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation and no-more-learning. The topic we are beginning tonight is called Mahayana Definite Discrimination, which concerns the Mahayana path of preparation. The previous topic, Mahayana Precepts explained what is to be practised. Having made a vast effort to listen to and contemplate the meaning of the precepts while on the path of accumulation, one progresses to the next path, the path of preparation. This explains why the topic of Definite Discrimination is presented after Precepts.

The forms of life suitable to actualise the Mahayana path of preparation are the humans of the southern, eastern and western continents. Humans of the northern continent, however, are not suitable candidates for actualising the Mahayana path of preparation. Nor are those born in any of the three lower realms suitable for actualising the Mahayana path of preparation.

Humans born in the northern continent cannot actualise the path of preparation because of the overwhelming experience of bliss and peace that they find in that world due to their past virtuous karma. They won't have any thoughts of practising the Dharma because of their absorption in that state of bliss and peace, nor do they experience any kind of pain and unhappiness. They do not see any cause to complain or feel dissatisfaction in their existence. At the other extreme, those born in the lower realms are there because of their past non-virtuous karma. They are subjected to the continuous experience of suffering, pain, stupidity and mental dullness, so they do not have any opportunity to practise the Dharma.

## 1.3. FOUR BRANCHES OF DEFINITE DISCRIMINATION

### 1.3.1. Definition

The definition of the Mahayana path of preparation is:

A Mahayana mundane path that is concordant with the clear realisation of truth and abides in a class of clear realisers that arise subsequent to the completion of the partial concordance with liberation. It and the

Mahayana partial concordance with definite discrimination are mutually inclusive.

The definition begins with the words *a Mahayana mundane path*, which indicates that the path of preparation is a Mahayana mundane path. This means that even those on the Mahayana path of preparation who have attained arhatship, or the liberation of the Lesser Vehicle before entering the Mahayana path, are on the Mahayana mundane path. Generally speaking, they are aryas or superior beings because they have attained the state of liberation or nirvana, and thus have gone beyond the mundane path. However, when they are on the Mahayana path of preparation, they are on the Mahayana mundane path.

The words *clear realisation of the truth* refer to the direct realisation of the truth, which occurs on entering the path of seeing – the path where you gain the direct penetration of truth. *Concordant* means that the path of preparation is similar to the clear realisation of the path of seeing.

When the definition says *abides in a class of clear realisers that arise subsequent to the completion of the partial concordance of liberation*, the word *subsequent* means 'after', while *partial concordance with partial liberation* refers to the path of accumulation.

### 1.3.2. Four divisions

When divided there are four:

1. The heat level of the Mahayana path of preparation
2. The peak level of the Mahayana path of preparation
3. The tolerance level of the Mahayana path of preparation, and
4. The supreme mundane quality level of the Mahayana path of preparation.

### The criteria determining movement between the divisions

The four levels of the path of preparation are the heat level, the peak level, the tolerance level and the supreme Dharma level. Just as the criteria that decide how you move from the path of accumulation to the path of preparation are related to the level of the realisation of emptiness, the four levels of the path of preparation are also differentiated on the basis of progress through the levels of the realisation of emptiness.

The difference between the four levels of the path of preparation relates to the levels of realisation of emptiness with respect to the capacity of each to destroy grasping at true existence. Consider the example of two objects, one of which is very special and valuable and the other one not so valuable. Our grasping at the object that is more precious and of greater value is stronger than our grasping at the other object. So, there is a difference between the two in terms of the strength of the grasping.

Likewise, we can talk of the two types of the conception of grasping at the true existence – the afflicted class of phenomena and the purified class of phenomena. Of the two, grasping at the afflicted class of phenomena is grosser than grasping at the purified class of phenomena. Hence it is easier to abandon the afflicted class of phenomena. The primary difference between the first two levels of path of preparation is that the heat level of the path of

preparation has the capacity to prevent the manifested grasping at the true existence of the afflicted but not the purified classes of phenomena. The peak level of the path of preparation realisation of emptiness has the capacity to destroy the manifested conception of self-grasping of both the afflicted and purified classes of phenomena.

### **1.3.2.1. The heat level of the Mahayana path of preparation**

The path of preparation is reached when a bodhisattva who is on the path of accumulation has developed the realisation of emptiness arising from the meditation that combines calm abiding and special insight into emptiness. So, the realisation of emptiness that arises from the union of calm abiding and special insight while in meditation marks the beginning of the path of preparation, and the first level or stage of the path of preparation is called the heat level.

The following two verses from the root text present the Mahayana path of preparation:

- I.25. By way of objects of observation, aspects, Cause, and restrainers  
The entities of heat and so forth  
Of protective Bodhisattvas –*
- I.26. Having the four conceptions  
[As objects of abandonment] accordingly  
And [having divisions of] small, medium, and great –  
Surpass those of Hearers as well as the  
Rhinoceros-like.*

Here the root text presents the Mahayana path of preparation, showing how it surpasses the path of preparation of hearers and solitary realisers in several ways: the *object of observation*, the *aspects*, the *cause*, the *restrainers* – referring to the gurus – the *entities*, the *object of abandonment* that each counteracts and the *division* into small, medium, and great.

In this way, the attributes of the Mahayana path of preparation surpass those of the Lesser Vehicle. We should note that here we are not talking about the differences between the tenet systems of the Lower and Great Vehicles. Rather, we are talking about the differences between the path of the Lesser Vehicle – sravakas and pratyekabuddhas – and the Great Vehicle. While the sravakas, pratyekabuddhas and Mahayana practitioners each have the five paths of accumulation and so forth, the Mahayana path is superior to that of sravakas and pratyekabuddhas. So, the Mahayana path of preparation surpasses the path of preparation of both the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas.

The root text then explains the special attributes of the Mahayana path of preparation on the heat level that make it superior to the Lesser Vehicle.

- I.27. The objects of observation are impermanence and so forth  
Based on the truths. The aspect  
Is to stop manifest adherence and so forth;  
Cause of attaining all three vehicles.*

### **1.3.2.2. The peak level of the Mahayana path of preparation**

The following verses explain the superior attributes of the peak level of the Mahayana path of preparation:

- I. 28. Forms and so forth devoid of coming together and decay, [inexpressible]  
As devoid of abiding and as abiding; and the imputed as inexpressible.  
Those nonabiding forms and so forth  
Are without inherent existence in their entity –*
- I.29. They are mutually one nature.  
Those do not abide [ultimately] as impermanent and so forth.  
They are empty of their nature.  
They are mutually one nature.*
- I.30. Because phenomena are not apprehended  
And those are not seen as signs [of true establishment],  
All thoroughly analyzed by wisdom  
Are unobservable.*

### **1.3.2.3. The tolerance level of the Mahayana path of preparation**

The special attributes of the tolerance level of the path of preparation are:

- I.31. Forms and so forth are natureless.  
The absence of that is the nature.  
Those are without production and deliverance;  
Are pure; and those are signless.*
- I.32ab. Due to not relying on signs of them  
There is no belief and discrimination of them.*

### **1.3.2.4. The supreme mundane quality level of the Mahayana path of preparation**

The supreme Dharma Mahayana path of preparation is explained thus:

- I.32cd. Meditative stabilizations, the functioning of those,  
Prophecy, extinction of conceit.*
- I.33. The three are mutually one entity;  
[Hence] nonconceptualization [as] meditative stabilization.  
In that way the concordances with a portion of definite discrimination  
Are small, medium, and great.*

### **Differences between the Lesser Vehicle and the Mahayana Vehicle**

We will skip a detailed word by word explanation of the meaning of these verses. Even I don't know it well and you will simply get more confused. In essence, we find here several differences between the Mahayana path of preparation and the Lesser Vehicle path of preparation. The first is in terms of the depth of analysis of the **object** of observation with respect to emptiness. In the Mahayana Vehicle, you realise emptiness through the extensive use of logic and reason, whereas such realisation is lacking in the Lesser Vehicle.

The different **aspects** refers to the mental aspect of the path. When emptiness or the four noble truths are the subjects of meditation, the aspect of the mind that realises it on the Mahayana path of preparation, which is based on extensive use of multiple logic and reasons, is much more extensive than that on the Lesser Vehicle path.

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The difference in terms of the **cause** means serving as a proximate cause to bring forth the Mahayana path of seeing, which directly realises the lack of self of a person or other phenomena and the lack of dualistic appearance of subject and object. Whereas the path of preparation of the Lesser Vehicle doesn't serve as a proximate cause to bring about the Mahayana path of seeing.

The next criteria making difference is the **restrainers** or *yong tsin* in Tibetan, which is another word for guru, teacher or spiritual guide. One who is on the Mahayana path of preparation can be a perfect candidate to receive all the teachings from a supreme emanation of a buddha, whereas somebody who is on the path of preparation of the Lesser Vehicle can be a student of a supreme emanation of a buddha, but not suitable to receive the complete teachings.

Next is the difference in terms of the **conception** to be abandoned. Those who are on the Mahayana path of preparation are ready to focus on abandoning the conceptions of true existence or grasping at true existence. Those who are on the Lesser Vehicle path of preparation, on the other hand, are not ready to directly or primarily counteract the conception of true existence. Bear in mind that the *Ornament for Clear Realisations* presentation is in accordance with the Svatantrika Madhyamika school of tenets, according to which the two selflessnesses are different in terms of the object to be negated as well as the basis of designation.

The final difference is the **divisions**. For example, the supreme Dharma level of the Mahayana path of preparation can be subdivided into three of the small, medium and great levels. However, no such division is possible with respect to the supreme Dharma level of the path of preparation of the Lower Vehicle, because that level is only momentary for them.

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