

Overview of the *Ornament for Clear Realization*

The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras were taught by Shakyamuni Buddha during what is known as “the second turning of the wheel of Dharma.” They explicitly and extensively present the topic of emptiness of true existence of all phenomena. In addition, they also set forth in a hidden manner the different clear realizations developed by a spiritual aspirant on the path to buddhahood. In order to clarify and make explicit these clear realizations, Maitreya composed his *Ornament for Clear Realization*. Among the different commentaries on the *Ornament*, those by the Indian master Haribhadra are the basis for study in the Gelug tradition. Acharya Haribhadra commented on the *Ornament* from the point of view of the Yogachara-Svatantrika-Madhyamaka tenet system, and some of his assertions differ from those of the Prasangika-Madhyamaka tenet system, which is generally regarded as the highest among the tenet systems in Tibetan Buddhism.

The *Ornament for Clear Realization* is composed entirely of verses and is divided into eight chapters. Each chapter presents one clear realization, which is characterized by specific topics. The topics help to enhance the understanding of each clear realization by describing different features such as cause, entity, and result.

A total of eight clear realizations are presented. The first three – an exalted knower of all aspects, a knower of paths, and a knower of bases – are objects to be generated; the next four – an application in complete aspects, peak application, serial application, and instantaneous application – are the four practices to be engaged in; and the final clear realization – exalted wisdom truth body ⁵ – is the final object to be attained. In this way, the entire bodhisattva path to enlightenment, or buddhahood, is clarified. However, the overall presentation is not a simple step-by-step description of the path from the initial point of entry until the attainment of the final result. Instead, the entire path to enlightenment is revealed within the presentation of each clear realization.

Brief Explanation of the Title

The full name of the text in Sanskrit is *Abhisamayalamkara-nama-prajñāparamita-upadesha-shastra*. This is translated into English as *Treatise of Quintessential Instructions of the Perfection of Wisdom Called Ornament for Clear Realization*.

A Buddhist “*treatise*” possesses two qualities: cure and protection. It helps to *cure* the disease of the afflictions, and it *protects* sentient beings from the general sufferings of cyclic existence, and particularly from the sufferings of the lower realms. This text is known as a “*quintessential instruction*” because it is an instruction or a means for easily realizing the meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras.

With respect to the word “*ornament*,” the *Ornament* itself is described as a clarifying ornament because it clarifies the hidden meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras. There are four types of ornaments described in the commentaries: natural, beautifying, clarifying, and joyful ornaments. For example, a person’s beautiful body is a natural ornament, which is further adorned with the beautifying ornaments of bracelets and so forth. When this is reflected in a clarifying ornament, such as a mirror, it generates joy in the mind of the person, which is a joyful ornament. Similarly, the natural ornament is the beautiful body of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras, which is adorned by the beautifying ornaments of the eight categories⁶ and seventy topics. When this appears in this treatise, the *Ornament for Clear Realization*, which is the clarifying ornament because it reflects the whole meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras adorned with the eight categories and seventy topics, it generates joy in the minds of the trainees, the joyful ornament.

The term “clear realization” refers to a path. A path is defined as an exalted knower conjoined with an uncontrived mind of definite emergence.⁷ A clear realization is a consciousness to which the name “path” has been given because just as an external path leads a person to his destination, a consciousness-path leads a being to a higher level of spiritual realization. The *Ornament* presents the different clear realizations developed by a bodhisattva, as well as those possessed by a fully enlightened buddha.

Overview of the Eight Categories and Seventy Topics

The eight categories are set forth in the eight chapters of the *Ornament* (see note 6 for an explanation of the difference between the eight clear realizations and the eight categories). Each category is presented by means of different numbers of topics, totaling seventy topics as follows:

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| 1. Exalted Knower of All Aspects | (10 topics) |
| 2. Knower of Paths | (11 topics) |
| 3. Knower of Bases | (9 topics) |
| 4. Application in Complete Aspects | (11 topics) |
| 5. Peak Application | (8 topics) |

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| 6. Serial Application | (13 topics) |
| 7. Instantaneous Application | (4 topics) |
| 8. Resultant Truth Body | (4 topics) |

The eight categories are grouped into:

1. the three objects to be cultivated,
2. the four means for attaining them, and
3. the final result.

The three exalted knowers are the objects to be practiced and cultivated by the four applications. Meditating on the three exalted knowers refers to meditating on the aspects of the three exalted knowers. One way of meditating on the aspects is to generate the mind in the nature of the aspects. This is akin to meditating on compassion in order to generate the mind in the nature of compassion. It is not like the case of an eye consciousness perceiving a form, in which the object, form, remains separate from the mind perceiving it. An exalted knower of all aspects is the means that enables the buddhas to turn the wheel of Dharma and set forth teachings suited to the dispositions of the trainees. With a knower of paths, a bodhisattva arya is able to guide trainees on their respective paths based on his own realizations. By means of a knower of bases, hearer and solitary realizer aryas achieve their desired goal, the peace of nirvana, in which true sufferings and true origins have been pacified.

The four applications are the means for attaining these three exalted knowers; hence, they are the causes of the three exalted knowers. They are yogas, or practices, in the continuum of a bodhisattva, that are either calm abiding or a union of calm abiding and special insight meditating on the aspects of the exalted knowers. Such a union refers to a special wisdom that sees its object clearly and is maintained on the basis of a concentrated mind.⁸ An application in complete aspects cultivates all 173 aspects of the three exalted knowers in order to gain control over them. Once control has been achieved, one enters the peak application. A serial application progressively cultivates the aspects of the three exalted knowers for the sake of attaining stability with respect to them, and this will give rise to the instantaneous application once stability in the aspects of the three exalted knowers has been attained. This last application occurs in the instant just prior to the attainment of buddhahood and is the direct cause for enlightenment.

The final result of the applications is the resultant truth body – the final object of attainment. “Resultant truth body” is synonymous with buddha; by learning about

its excellent qualities, one is moved to generate a strong aspiration to achieve it for the sake of benefiting others.

Following are descriptions of each of the eight categories, together with the topics that characterize them.

1. Exalted Knower of All Aspects

The first chapter of the *Ornament* describes an exalted knower of all aspects, which is the omniscient mind of a buddha. It is a culminated exalted wisdom that knows all aspects of all objects of knowledge. The manner in which it is presented is by way of the ten topics, beginning with the Mahayana conventional generated mind. These ten topics serve to characterize such an exalted knower and thus help us develop an understanding of the omniscient mind. The ten topics are:

1. **Mahayana conventional generated mind** (Skt. *bodhicitta*).
This is presented first, since it is only with the development of such a mind aspiring to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings that one enters the Mahayana path.
2. **Mahayana instruction**.
These are instructions on the two truths, the four noble truths, the Three Jewels, and so forth.
3. **Mahayana path of preparation**.
This is the second of the five paths of a bodhisattva.
4. **Lineage abiding in the nature**, the support of Mahayana achievings.
In general, a lineage abiding in the nature is also known as “buddha-nature.” All sentient beings possess this lineage, which is the reason that they have the potential to achieve buddhahood.
5. **Objects of observation** of Mahayana achievings.
All phenomena are presented as the objects of observation of a bodhisattva’s practice.
6. **Objects of intent** of Mahayana achievings.
These are the final results that a bodhisattva exerts effort to achieve.
7. **Achieving of armor**.
This is the bodhisattva’s practice of all six perfections within each of the six perfections.
8. **Achieving of engagement**.
This is the bodhisattva’s practice of engaging with joyous effort to develop meditative absorptions, the six perfections, the four immeasurables, and so forth.

9. Achieving of accumulation.

This is the bodhisattva's practice to accumulate the two vast collections of merits and wisdom.

10. Achieving of definite emergence.

This is the bodhisattva's practice of the pure grounds, that undoubtedly issues forth the exalted knower of all aspects.

2. Knower of Paths

Knowers of paths are clear realizations found only in the continua of Mahayana aryas – i.e., bodhisattva aryas and buddha aryas. They are of three types:

- those that know hearers' paths,
- those that know solitary realizers' paths, and
- those that know Mahayana paths.

A bodhisattva arya develops these knowers of paths in the manner of actually generating in his or her continuum the different realizations shared with hearers and solitary realizers, as well as those unique to the Mahayana. It is not just a matter of knowing the different realizations and attainments in a theoretical fashion. With a knower of paths, a bodhisattva is able to guide sentient beings of different dispositions, according to their different inclinations, to their desired goals of a hearer's or solitary realizer's nirvana or a buddha's enlightenment. A knower of paths is characterized by eleven topics:

1. Branches of a knower of paths.

These are the causes, entity, and result of a knower of paths.

2. Knower of paths knowing hearers' paths.

This is a Mahayana arya's clear realization of what is to be known for the purpose of guiding sentient beings with an inclination for the hearers' path to a hearers' nirvana. The principal realization is a realization of the selflessness of persons.

3. Knower of paths knowing solitary realizers' paths.

This is a Mahayana arya's clear realization of what is to be known for the purpose of guiding sentient beings with an inclination for the solitary realizers' path to the solitary realizers' nirvana. The principal realization in this case is the realization of the emptiness of apprehenders and apprehendeds being different substances.

4. Mahayana path of seeing.

This is the first occasion when a bodhisattva gains a direct realization of the emptiness of true existence.

5. Function of a Mahayana path of meditation.

These are the beneficial qualities that are attained through the force of cultivating the Mahayana path of meditation.

6. Mahayana path of meditation of belief.

This is a subsequent clear realization, i.e., a clear realization of a bodhisattva on the Mahayana path of meditation, that is convinced that the three Mother Sutras are the source of attaining one's own aim, others' aims, and both one's own and others' aims.

7. Benefits of the Mahayana path of meditation of belief.

These refer to the excellent qualities achieved through the force of cultivating the Mahayana path of meditation of belief. The benefits are to receive praises, veneration, and laudations.

8. Path of meditation of dedication.

This is a conceptual Mahayana clear realization that acts to transform one's own or others' roots of virtue into a cause for complete enlightenment.

9. Path of meditation of rejoicing.

This is a conceptual Mahayana clear realization that is very joyful regarding one's own or others' roots of virtue.

10. Path of meditation of achieving.

This is a non-conceptual Mahayana clear realization that deposits an imprint for achieving the final realization of a buddha.

11. Path of meditation of purity.

This is a non-conceptual Mahayana clear realization that deposits an imprint for achieving the final abandonment of a buddha.

3. Knower of Bases

A knower of bases is an exalted wisdom developed by all aryas. The word "bases" refers to the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths. The principal realization in this case is the wisdom directly realizing the selflessness of persons. Through this knower of bases, hearers and solitary realizers seeking the peace of nirvana are led to the total pacification of all sufferings. This category is characterized by nine topics.

[Note: not all the topics under this heading are applicable to all aryas—some are applicable only to Mahayana aryas. Also, topics 7 and 8 exist on the Mahayana paths of accumulation and preparation, as well as on the Mahayana arya paths: the paths of seeing and meditation.]

1. Knower of paths not abiding in cyclic existence through knowing.

This is a Mahayana arya's clear realization that does not abide in the extreme of cyclic existence through knowing. This knowing – the wisdom realizing the selflessness of persons – liberates one from cyclic existence.

2. Knower of paths not abiding in solitary peace through compassion.

This refers to a Mahayana arya's clear realization that does not abide in the extreme of solitary peace through compassion. Due to great compassion, a bodhisattva does not dwell in the solitary peace of nirvana and does not disregard the sufferings of other sentient beings.

3. Knower of bases that is distant from the resultant Mother.

This knower of bases, which is a Hinayana arya's clear realization, is devoid of great compassion and bound by the conception of true existence. Therefore, it is far from achieving the resultant Mother – the complete enlightenment of a buddha.

4. Knower of bases that is near to the resultant Mother.

This knower of bases is a Mahayana arya's clear realization, and is described as “near” to the resultant Mother due to possessing great compassion and the wisdom directly realizing emptiness.

5. Knower of bases of the discordant class.

This knower of bases, which is a Hinayana arya's clear realization, is devoid of special method and wisdom and, thus, should not be cultivated by a bodhisattva. Hence, it is labeled as the discordant class.

6. Knower of bases of the antidotal class.

Being conjoined with special method and wisdom, this knower of bases is to be cultivated by a bodhisattva.

7. Applications of a bodhisattva indicated in the context of the knower of bases.

These applications of a bodhisattva cultivate the antidote to the perverse conceptions adhering to true existence.

8. Equality of the applications of a bodhisattva indicated in the context of the knower of bases.

These are applications of a bodhisattva that stop adherence to true existence with respect to the entities of phenomena, their divisions, definitions, definienda, and so forth.

9. Path of seeing explicitly indicated in this context.

This presents the sixteen instants of the Mahayana path of seeing, which directly realize freedom from the elaborations of true existence.

4. Application in Complete Aspects

An application in complete aspects is a bodhisattva's meditation on the 173 different aspects of the three exalted knowers by way of a union of calm abiding and special insight. This is for the purpose of attaining control over these different aspects. It is characterized by eleven topics:

1. Knower-aspects of the antidotal class explicitly indicated in this context
2. Principal applications explicitly indicated in this context
3. Excellent qualities of Mahayana applications
4. Faults of the applications
5. Yoga of the path perfection of wisdom (also known as “characteristics of the applications”)
6. Mahayana partial concordance with liberation explicitly indicated in this context
7. Mahayana partial concordance with definite discrimination explicitly indicated in this context
8. Bodhisattva sangha who has attained a sign of irreversibility
9. Application of equality of cyclic existence and solitary peace
10. Application of pure land
11. Application of skillful means

[Since the fourth category, application in complete aspects, is the main subject matter of this Basic Program Manual, its topics are not elaborated upon in this introductory section.]

5. Peak Application

A peak application is attained when a bodhisattva attains control over the 173 aspects of the three exalted knowers. It occurs on the Mahayana path of preparation. “To attain control” means to achieve the ability to meditate on all 173 aspects in the correct order without mistake in a single session. This application is characterized by eight topics:

1. Peak application of heat.

The peak application of the heat level of the Mahayana path of preparation is attained when the bodhisattva attains the twelve signs that indicate its attainment.

2. Peak application of peak.

The bodhisattva on the peak application of the peak level possesses an increase in merit

3. Peak application of forbearance.

The bodhisattva on the peak application of the forbearance level has attained a stable wisdom realizing a complete similitude of the three exalted knowers and a stable method that does not forsake the welfare of sentient beings.

4. Peak application of supreme mundane quality.

The bodhisattva on the peak application of the supreme mundane quality level, the fourth level of the path of preparation, has attained a thorough stability of mind with respect to limitless meditative stabilizations, which ripen the capacity of the bodhisattva to generate the Mahayana path of seeing.

5. Peak application of the path of seeing.

This peak application acts as the direct antidote to the acquired conceptions of true existence and their seeds. These conceptions are presented in four categories:

- i. the conception of true existence of objects to be engaged in,
- ii. the conception of true existence of objects to be turned away from,
- iii. the conception of true existence of object-possessors apprehending substantial existents, and
- iv. the conception of true existence of object-possessors apprehending imputed existents.

6. Peak application of the path of meditation.

Similarly, the peak application of the path of meditation is presented along with the four types of innate conception of true existence that are abandoned by it.

7. Uninterrupted peak application.

This is the peak application of the last instant of the path of meditation, just prior to the attainment of buddhahood. It functions to directly produce an exalted knower of all aspects, the omniscient mind of a buddha.

8. Perverse achieving that is to be eliminated indicated here.

This refers to the sixteen types of wrong conceptions that are to be eliminated. They are all related to conceiving the two truths, ultimate truth and conventional truth, as not suitable to be posited on a single base.

6. Serial Application

A serial application is a bodhisattva's practice to attain stability in his meditation on the 173 aspects of the three exalted knowers. In order to do so, these aspects are

meditated on serially or progressively. The wisdom that progressively cultivates these aspects is conjoined with a bodhisattva's practices, of which thirteen are described here:

- 1-6. The serial applications of the six perfections: generosity, ethics, patience, joyous effort, concentration, and wisdom.
- 7-12. The serial applications of the six recollections. These are recollection of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, ethics, giving, and the gods.
13. The serial application of the entitiness of non-things. This is the wisdom realizing the emptiness of true existence.

7. Instantaneous Application

When serial application is perfected, its result is an instantaneous application. This application has attained stability in the 173 aspects of the three exalted knowers. It exists only on the last instant of the path of meditation, which is also known as "the end of the continuum of a sentient being." Beyond this point, a bodhisattva has achieved enlightenment and is no longer a sentient being. This application can be conceptually divided into four, although these four are, in reality, one entity:

1. Non-ripened instantaneous application
2. Ripened instantaneous application
3. Characterless instantaneous application
4. Non-dual instantaneous application

8. Resultant Truth Body

The final result that is attained by the strength of cultivating the 173 aspects of the three exalted knowers is a resultant truth body, or a buddha. When divided, there are:

1. Nature body (Skt. *svabhavikakaya*). The emptiness of true existence of the mind of a buddha.
2. Complete enjoyment body (Skt. *sambhogakaya*). The form body of a buddha that is perceivable only by bodhisattva aryas in Akanishta pure land.
3. Emanation body (Skt. *nirmanakaya*). The form body of a buddha that is emanated for the sake of guiding ordinary beings.
4. Exalted wisdom truth body (Skt. *jñanakaya*). The enlightened mind of a buddha.

As an auxiliary topic, the twenty-seven types of exalted activities of a buddha are also presented here.

Conclusion

To summarize, the *Ornament* presents the final result of the Buddhist path, a resultant truth body, along with its excellent qualities. When one comes to see the marvelous qualities of a buddha, one is moved and develops the aspiration wishing to achieve that buddhahood. However, buddhahood, or complete enlightenment, is not attained by merely wishing for it, nor can it be bestowed by someone else. It is necessary to cultivate it. Therefore, the *Ornament* describes the four applications: application in complete aspects, peak application, serial application, and instantaneous application. If asked, what are the objects to be cultivated by these applications? The answer is the three exalted knowers: an exalted knower of all aspects, a knower of paths, and a knower of bases. In this way, through presenting the eight categories and seventy topics, the *Ornament* sets out the complete path of a bodhisattva and reveals the hidden teachings of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras.