



Ashtamangala in Buddhism with special reference to Dharamchakra

Miss Meenu Pandey

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Research Scholar

PG Department of philosophy.

T.M.B.U., Bhagalpur, Bihar.

Bhagalpur, Bihar – 812001. India.

Ashtamangla:

The Ashtamangala (ashta meaning eight and mangla means auspicious) are a suite of eight auspicious symbols revered for their sacredness in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. In Buddhism these symbols in ascending order are as follows:

1. A White Parasol
2. A Pair of golden Fishes
3. A Treatise Vase
4. A Lotus
5. A Right-Spiralling White Conch Shells
6. An Endless Knot or 'lucky diagram'
7. A Victorious Banner
8. A Golden Wheel

1. The Parasol:

The Parasol or umbrella is a traditional Indian symbol of royalty and protection. It symbolises protection from the painful heat of suffering, desire, obstacles, illness and harmful forces. The white coloured parasol that was presented to him by the serpent king essentially symbolizes his ability to protect all beings from delusions and fears. A peacock feathered parasol more specifically represents secular authority.

2. A pair of golden fishes:

It is an ancient symbol of the two main sacred rivers of India, the Ganga and Yamuna. Symbolically these two rivers represent nostrils and carry the alternative rhythm of breadth or prana. In Buddhism the golden fish represent happiness and spontaneity, as they have complete freedom of movement in the water. They represent freedom from restraint of caste and status, as they mingle and touch readily.

3. The treatise vase:

It is modelled upon on the traditional Indian clay water pot, known as kumbha and kalasha. The vase of inexhaustible treasure is also known as 'The Treasure Chest' which explains that 'No matter how much of Buddha's treatise he gave away, the amount of treasure in his chest never diminishes'. Despite the fact that Buddha's teaching has been dispersed to billions of people over the ages, his love and wisdom will never diminish.

4. The lotus:

It is the Buddhist symbol of purity and renunciation. The fact that lotus grow on stalks suspended from the water has also been used as symbol of rising above the suffering of the world through the eight-fold paths. A Buddhist lotus is described as having four, eight, twenty-four, sixty-four, hundred or thousand petals. These numbers symbolically correspond to the internal lotuses or chakras of the subtle body, and the numeric components of the mandala.

5. The conch:

The white conch shell, which spirals towards the right in a clockwise direction, is an ancient Indian attribute of heroic Gods. In Buddhism the conch symbolises his fearless in proclaiming the truth of the dharma, and his call to awaken and work for the benefit of others.

6. Glorious knot:

originally a symbol of love and it represents ultimate unity within everything. It also represents as enlightenment that arises from the union of compassion and union.

7. Victory banner:

In buddhism, it symbolises victory of the dharma over fear, ignorance and death. In Tibetan doctrine the banner symbolises victory over the four types of māras or great illusions, which bar the way to illumination, they are emotional defilement, lust, passion and the fear of death.

In Chinese Buddhism these eight symbols represent the eight vital organs of Buddha's body i.e. parasol as spleen, two golden fish as kidneys, vase as stomach, lotus as liver, conch as gall bladder, knot as intestine, victory banner as lungs and the last golden wheel as heart. It is also said that in Buddhist tradition these eight symbols of good fortune represent the offerings presented by the great Vedic gods to the sakyamuni Buddha upon his attainment of enlightenment. Brahma was the first of these Gods to appear before Buddha, and he presented a thousand spoked golden wheel as a symbolic request for the Buddha to teach through 'turning the wheel of the dharma'. Indra the great sky God Indra appeared next, and he presented his mighty white conch-shell as a symbolic request for the Buddha to 'proclaim the truth of the dharma'. Sthavara, the earth God had borne witness to the Buddha's enlightenment presented skakyamuni with the golden vase full of nectar of Immortality. It is said that a jewelled parasol was reputedly offered to the Buddha by the king of the serpent or Nagas.

8. Golden wheel or the Dharmachakra:

Vishnu's weapon for defeating evil was Sudarshan chakra, a metal circle surrounded by 108 blades. Vishnu's Sudarshan chakra is also a symbol of motion, continuity and the perpetuity of the universe. These symbolic association carried over into early Buddhism, where the wheel became known as Dharam chakra, or the wheel of dharma, which are also considered to be eternal truths. The dharma wheel (often depicted as chariot wheel) has three basic parts- the hub, the spoke and the rim, symbolises the three aspects of the Buddhism teachings upon ethics, wisdom and concentration. The hub, rim and spoke also represent the three trainings in Buddhism that is sila, prajna and samadhi.

HUB	The hub signifies liberation, enlightenment, nirvana, where all desires come to rest. The central hub represents ethical discipline, which centers and stabilizes the mind.
SPOKE	The spokes denote the ways that lead from the restless motion of samsara to the realization of that peace which is nirvana. There is not only one way to realization, but many. Thus, the sharp spokes represent wisdom which cuts through ignorance.
RIM	The rim forms the circle, the symbol of infinity, of the world. It is in motion whereas the hub stays still. The rim denotes not only infinity but endless motion; the eternal cycle of birth and death. Samsara is connected by the spokes to the motionless center, the hub.

There are different designs of the Buddhist chakra with eight, twelve twenty-four spokes. In different Buddhist tradition, the different number of spokes may represent different aspects of the Buddhas dharma (teaching). Let us see some of them:

4 Spokes	Four noble truths
8 Spokes	Eight-fold path.
10 Spokes	Ten directions.
12 Spokes	Twelve links of dependent origination
24 Spokes	Twelve rules of dependent origination plus the reversing of the twelve links and liberations from samsara (also called Ashoka Chakra)
31 Spokes	Thirty-one realms of existence from ancient Buddhist cosmology.
1000 Spokes	Emanate the rays of sun, represent the 1000 activities and teaching of the Buddhas.

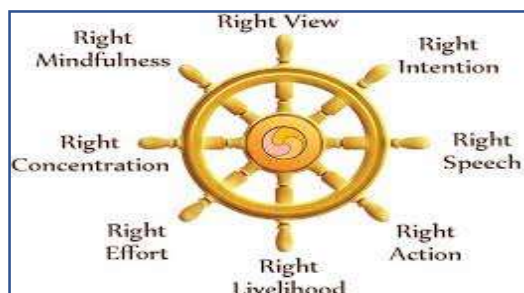


Fig. 1 the Eight-Fold Path



Fig. 2 Dependent Origination

8.1 Turnings of the wheel:

the wheel of the law (Dharmachakra) is the single most important symbol of Buddhism. Forty-nine days after Buddha attained the enlightenment, the Gods Brahma and Indra requested him to teach saying:

*“O Buddha, Treasure of Compassion,
Living beings are like blind people, in constant danger of falling into the lower realms.
Other than you there is no Protector in this world.
Therefore, we beseech you, please rise from meditative equipoise and turn the Wheel of dharma.”*

As a result of this request, Buddha rose from meditation and taught the first Wheel of Dharma. These teachings, which include the sutra of the Four Noble Truths. The wheel of law turns clockwise twelve times, three times for each of the four-noble truth of Buddhism. The wheel in Tibet is known as ‘ridag choekor’, seen over the entrance to virtually all monasteries as a symbol of energy, power and unity of all things.

Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths that forms the basis of Buddhist thought:

1. Life is suffering
2. Suffering is caused by craving
3. Suffering can have an end
4. The eight-fold path leads to the end of suffering.

8.2 The three turnings of the wheel:

It refers to the framework for understanding the sutra stream of the teachings of the Buddhism. The first turning often depicted with two deer either side of the chakra or wheel remembering the first sermon of Buddha at a Deer park at Sarnath, consists of the teachings of Four Noble Truths. The second turning is said to have taken place at Vulture Mountain in Rajagriha, in Bihar, by Nagarjuna, the founder of Madhamika school with emphasis on emptiness. The third turning affirms that the earlier turnings while being authentic are also flawed or incomplete and require interpretation.

Buddha became a ‘world ruler’ though not in the usual meaning of the term but rather as one who conquered the world by self-conquest, and by realizing the highest potentialities of his being in the thousand-patalled chakra (sahasra-chakra) of his enlightened mind.

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