

# A Glimpse of the Great Perfection<sup>1</sup>

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The nature of mind is the unity of awareness and emptiness...  
The nature of mind is clear light.

—Shakyamuni Buddha

In order to lead living beings to understanding  
I taught all the different *yanas*...

—Shakyamuni Buddha (*Lankavatara Sutra*)

**Dharma in a cold climate: the supreme teaching.** In the ancient *Nyingma* tradition of Tibetan Buddhism the traditional Three Vehicles of Buddhahood—*Hinayana/Theravada*, *Mahayana*, and *Vajrayana* are viewed as the nine vehicles to liberation/enlightenment. According to H. H. The Dalai Lama the first eight vehicles utilize our ordinary obstructed mind as the causal path to enlightenment and ultimately Buddhahood. Such renunciation and transformation takes many lifetimes. However, in the Fruitional Vehicle the mind itself is primordially pure and always already Buddha from the very beginning. This subtlest and most direct vehicle, the Ati Yoga of *Dzogchen*, the Great Perfection utilizes our already present dynamic intrinsic Primordial Awareness Wisdom as the path. This path is considered by most Buddhist masters to be the pinnacle of all of the Buddhist vehicles to liberation and may, under the most auspicious circumstances, be accomplished in a single lifetime. This wisdom is the “unchanging *rigpa* awareness” that is no other than Samantabhadra (Kuntazangpo), the primordial *Dharmakaya* (perfect body of truth, empty in essence and the very nature of mind) Adi Buddha who is our pristine fundamental original nature, our “innate mind of clear light,” primordially pure and utterly untainted by the karmic winds of conceptual thought and negative emotion (Longchen Rabjam 2007). This numinous luminous presence of *vidya/rigpa* awareness wisdom is inherently present in all human beings. Indeed, all the arising phenomena of ordinary mind always are this pristine primordial wisdom awareness. That is the actual nature of all phenomena. And that is the supreme identity of human beings, without exception.

The most important way to understand the Great Perfection is in terms of essence, nature and compassionate energy according to which the essence is primordial purity and the nature is spontaneous presence... all the

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A and *The Buddhist View: Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen* ©David Paul Boaz, 2006 at [www.davidpaulboaz.org](http://www.davidpaulboaz.org). **Dzogchen Caveat:** Contemporary Nyingma masters warn that the *Dzogchen* view and practice is often misunderstood to be an antinomian, nihilistic denial of reality. Thus it is urgent that the actual practices of *Trekchö* and *Tögal* not be approached without the guidance of a qualified *Dzogchen* master. This teaching cannot be learned, let alone accomplished, from books and intellectual speculation. The great and precious knowledge treasure that is the Great Perfection is not a conceptual enterprise. Although the presence of the dynamic intrinsic awareness that is the luminous Nature of Mind abides now and always in ordinary mind, the ultimate realization of That requires extensive “gradualist” tantric practice with a master, which in due course reveals the great paradox (to conceptual mind) that “it is already accomplished;” that which you seek is always already present from the very beginning. *E Ma Ho. Mahasukaho!*

phenomena of samsara, nirvana and the path are, by their very nature, the rigpa awareness that is the primordial buddha Samantabhadra, and they are never outside of the primordial expanse of buddhahood... This the fundamental innate mind of clear light.

—H. H. The Dalai Lama in Longchen Rabjam 2007 p. 78

According to Sogyal Rinpoche (1992), Dzogchen is “the primordial state, the state of total awakening that is the heart-essence of all the Buddhas and all spiritual paths, and the summit of an individual’s spiritual evolution.” Therefore the practice of *Dzogchen* is the recognition, then realization of our always present inherent Buddha Nature, which is who we actually are from the very beginning.

**Buddha cognition.** According to H. H. The Dalai Lama, the subtlest view of the *Nyingma* lineage’s tantric Buddhist teaching is *Ati Dzogchen* (*Dzogpachenpo*, *Mahasandhi*) the Great Perfection. And the *Essence Mahamundra* of the Kagyu School, and the *Madhyamaka of the Definitive Meaning* are essentially the same as *Dzogchen* as to the View and the fruit or result, namely Buddhahood. On the *Dzogchen* view the realm of Relative Truth (*samvriti satya*)—form (objective reality) and formless form (mental and subjective experience)—arises from its primordial energy (*jnana prana*) within the perfectly subjective pristine cognition of the vast expanse of Reality Itself (*dharmadhatu/jnana/chos byings yeshe*). According to His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche (1991) this unity of the absolute space of arising phenomena (*dharmadhatu/chos byings*) with primordial consciousness itself, is the luminosity of clearlight primordial awareness wisdom (*gnosis/jnana/yeshe*), utterly free of conceptual elaboration and negative emotion. This is the perfect sphere of *Dzogchen*. This Ultimate Reality (*dharmata/cho nyid*) is the *Madhyamaka* luminous emptiness (*shunyata*) that is the inherent nature of relative spacetime phenomena (*dharmal/chos*) whose apparitional or illusory face (*dharmil/cho can*) emerges from its primordial purity (*kadag*) of the emptiness base (*gzhi*) as the limited consciousness of sentient beings who perceive, then reify, then conceptually designate (*maya/ignorance/ajnana/marigpa*) these appearances as the seemingly substantial phenomena of a reified, imputed, permanent, absolute and substantial everyday intersubjective relative-conventional reality. Yet all such instantiation of phenomenal consciousness is “always already” illumined by the radiant original face of this primordial awareness wisdom (*jnana/yeshe*) that is their (our) intrinsic actual nature, the very nature of mind (*cittata/sems nyid*). And That (*Tat/Sat*) is not other than the perfect sphere of *Dzogchen*, the Great Perfection.

In this profound and subtle “practice of Ati Yoga, which is also secret such that only the fortunate can understand it,” Buddhahood (Buddha-nature/*buddhadhatu*) is accomplished, according to His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche, when the fundamental, primal intrinsic awareness (*vidya/rigpa*) of the Buddha Body of Reality Itself (*dharmakaya/chos-ku*) is liberated, exactly as it is, directly here and now through the continuity of recognition—“brief moments many times”—realization and perfection of the primordially pure body of Samantabhadra (*Kuntazangpo*), the *Dharmakaya* Buddha, who is none other than the pristine cognition of the supreme reality that is *dharmadhatu*, the vast Absolute Space of all phenomena, beyond belief, always already present as whatever arises in this very moment now, here in this very human body of light (*rang rig/rang rigpa*). In the words of great 14th century *Nyingma* master Longchen

Rabjam (Longchenpa):

“Naturally occurring timeless awareness—utterly lucid awakened mind—is something marvelous and superb, primordially and spontaneously present. It is the treasury from which comes the universe of appearances and possibilities, whether samsara or nirvana. Homage to the unwavering state, free of elaboration.”

—Longchen Rabjam (2001)

This clearlight (*'od gsal*) absolute space (*chos byings*) of phenomena that is Ultimate Truth (*paramartha satya*) must not be conflated with the material, contingent relative dimension of spacetime that arises within and through it. The prior unity of these conceptual “Two Truths” that is the nonconceptual all-embracing one truth, the perfect nondual sphere of *Dzogchen*, is ontologically prior, subsuming, transcending yet embracing and pervading the physical and mental spacetime dimension, including the “space particles” of the ground state of the quasi-physical Unified Quantum Vacuum. *The great paradoxical (to concept-mind) conclusion then is this: ultimately there is no difference! In the pristine cognition of equality—Buddha cognition (samatajnana/nyam-nyid yeshe—the Two Truths are equal. One and the same. An ontic prior unity. The primal duality of the conceptual binary that is the Two Truths is resolved in this one great, conceptually ineffable but not contemplatively ineffable nondual truth. “There is not the slightest difference between samsara and nirvana” (Nagarjuna).*

**The Unified Quantum Vacuum and the Great Perfection.** Thus, from this ultimate view, the Zero Point Energy of the Unified Quantum Vacuum arises from the *alayavijnana*, the substrate consciousness that arises from the primordial wisdom consciousness (*jnana/yeshe*) that is not other than the emptiness base (*gzhi*), the *Trikaya* of the Base. And from this Quantum Vacuum arises *citta/sems*, the human bodymind along with the *kosmic* gift that is the entire spacetime mansion of Relative Truth (*samvriti satya*). These are the three consciousness dimensions—*citta, alaya and jnana*—of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist view. O wonder of wonders, all beings are Buddha, *samsara* and *nirvana* are One! And all this, always here, now outshines perfectly just as it is, the natural state, ordinary “natural mind” the very nature of your (our) mind. So, as we surrender (*wu-wei, pistis/faith*) and relax into it, great joy (*mahasuka*). Nothing special (*wu shin*). *As we begin to see this post-transcendental, post-metaphysical, “ordinary mind” as the vast numinous primordial nature of reality—the very Nature of Mind—we wake up. “Now we spontaneously generate the love that is truly a refuge for all living beings.” (Vimalakirti).*

Again the great omniscient master Longchenpa transmits to us this supreme primordial wisdom (*gnosis, jnana, yeshe*) that is this very nature of mind (*citatta, sems nyid*), of *Kosmos*, of the vast infinite expanse of Reality Itself (*dharmata, cho nyid*).

Self arising wisdom is rigpa that is empty, clear and free from all elaboration, like an immaculate sphere of crystal... It does not analyze objects... By simply identifying that non-conceptual, pristine, naked rigpa, you realize there is nothing other than this nature... This is non-dual self-arising wisdom... Like a reflection in a mirror, when objects and

perceptions manifest to *rigpa*, that pristine and naked awareness which does not proliferate into thought is called the inner power (*tsal*), the responsiveness that is the ground (*gzhi*) for all the arising of things... For a yogin who realizes the naked meaning of Dzogpachenpo, *rigpa* is fresh, pure and naked, and objects may manifest and appear within *rigpa*, but it does not lose itself externally to those objects.

—Longchen Rabjam, *The Treasury of the Dharmadhatu* (Commentary), Adzom Chögar edition (quoted in H. H. the Dalai Lama, *Dzogchen*, 2000)

**Basic Principles.** According to recent Tibetan *Dzogchen rime* master Tulku Urgen Rinpoche, the two innermost principles of *Dzogchen* are Basic Space (*dharmadhatu/chos byings*) and Awareness (*vidya/rigpa*). This Basic Space is pregnant luminous emptiness, the unity of emptiness (*shunyata*) and the clearlight luminosity (*'od gsal*). In *Dzogchen*, the innermost secret realization of Basic Space is *klong*, the infinite “vast expanse” of Reality Itself, transcending all conceptual elaboration, judgement and bias, beyond even the subtlest subject-object duality, beyond objective and subjective emptiness, beyond ground and path luminosity (Boaz, 2004).

As space pervades, so awareness pervades... like space, *rigpa* is all-encompassing... Just as beings are all pervaded by space, *rigpa* pervades the minds of beings... Basic space is the absence of mental constructs, while awareness is the knowing of this absence of constructs, recognizing the complete emptiness of mind essence... The ultimate dharma is the realization of the indivisibility of basic space and awareness [that is] Samantabhadra.

—Tulku Urgyen (*As It is*, Vol. I, 1999 and *Rainbow Painting*, 1995)

So Basic Space and Primordial Awareness Wisdom are a prior ontological unity. Emptiness and the clear light are a unity. According to the Third Dordrupchen Jigme Tenpe Nyima “the *rigpa* taught in the *Nyingma Dzogchen* approach and the wisdom of clear light (*Mahamudra/Anuttara-yoga-tantra*) are one and the same.”

In *Dzogchen*, on the basis of the clear light itself, the way in which the clear light abides is made vivid and certain by the aspect of *rigpa* or knowing. That is free from any overlay of delusion and from any corrupting effect due to conceptual thoughts, that will inhibit the experience of clear light... It is not accomplished as something new, as a result of circumstances and conditions, but is present from the very outset. . .an awareness that can clearly perceive the way in which basic space and wisdom are present. On the basis of that key point, the realization of clear light radiates in splendor, becoming clearer and clearer, like a hundred million suns... Here the aware aspect of clear light or effulgent *rigpa* (which arises from essential *rigpa*) is stripped bare and you penetrate further into the depths of clear light... even as objects seem to arise... It is on the basis of this that you train.

—Third Dodrupchen Jigme Tenpe Nyima  
(quoted in H. H. The Dalai Lama, *Dzogchen*, 2000.)

**The Supreme Source.** A primary *Dzogchen* tantra, *The Kunjed Gyalpo (The Supreme Source)*, must surely be considered one of humankind's great spiritual treasures. According to *Dzogchen* master Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, this prehistorical supreme nondual teaching has been transmitted from master to disciple directly, heartmind to heartmind, for thousands of years. However, historical *Dzogchen* wisdom dates from the teaching of Garab Dorje (b. 55 CE). The *Kunjed Gyalpo* tantra arises in the 8th Century and is the fundamental tantra of the *Dzogchen semde* (mind) teaching series. This reading of the great nondual primordial *Dzogchen* teaching is derived from Buddhist sutra and tantra understanding of the ultimate Nature of Mind, yet its truth essence runs, like a golden thread through the grand tapestry of humankind's primordial Great Wisdom Tradition. *Kunjed Gyalpo, The Wise and Glorious King* is Samantabhadra (clarity) and Samantabhadri (emptiness) in inseparable *yabyum* embrace—androgynous skylike primordial Adi Buddha—the union of clarity and emptiness that is none other than our original Buddha Nature, Supreme Source, Basis, primordial womb of everything. Sambantabhadra, this *Dharmakaya* Buddha speaks to the *Logos*, Vajrasattva, *Sambhogakaya* Buddha:

The essence of all the Buddhas exists prior to samsara and nirvana... it transcends the four conceptual limits and is intrinsically pure; this original condition is the uncreated nature of existence that always existed, the ultimate nature of all phenomena... It is utterly free of the defects of dualistic thought which is only capable of referring to an object other than itself... it is the base of primordial purity... Similar to space it pervades all beings... The inseparability of the two truths, absolute and relative is called the 'primordial Buddha'... If at the moment the energy of the base manifests, one does not consider it something other than oneself... it self-liberates... Understanding the essence... one finds oneself always in this state . . .dwelling in the fourth time, beyond past, present and future... the infinite space of self-perfection... pure dharmakaya, the essence of the vajra of clear light.

—Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, *The Supreme Source (Kunjed Gyalpo)*, 1999

Thus do the sutras and the tantras of Buddha's teaching and the bivalent dualities of the path—objective and subjective, self and other, observer and data, true and false, relative and ultimate—abide in the prior unity of the dependently arisen perfect sphere of *Dzogchen*, the Great Perfection, ultimate mind nature, luminous innate clearlight mind that is always already the unity of awareness and emptiness, and of clarity and emptiness. Who is it, that I am? All the masters of the three times have told it. This infinite vast expanse of the primordial awareness wisdom continuum is who we actually are. *Tat tvam ami. That, I Am! That* is our supreme identity, great perfection of our always present Buddha Nature, deep heartseed presence of ultimate happiness that is both origin and aim of all our seeking.

**H. H. Dudjom Rinpoche's Comments on Garab Dorje's *Three Vajra Verses* or *The Three Essential Statements* that are the *Dzogchen* View, Meditation and Conduct (translated by John Reynolds):**

**Verse I: Recognize your own true nature** (The Base and View) "This fresh immediate awareness of the present moment, transcending all thoughts related to the three times (past, present, future), is itself that primordial awareness or knowledge (*yeshe*) that is self-originated intrinsic awareness (*rig pa*).” From this View arises the *Semde* teaching cycle.

**Verse II: Choose the state of presence, beyond doubt** (The Path and Meditation) "Whatever phenomena of *samsara* or *nirvana* may manifest, all of them represent the play of the creative energy or potentiality of one's own immediate intrinsic awareness (*rig pa'i rtsal*). One must decide upon this unique state for oneself and know that there exists nothing other than this." From The Path and Meditation arises the *Longde* teaching cycle.

**Verse III: Continue in the state with confidence in liberation** (The Fruit and Conduct) "Whatever gross or subtle thoughts may arise, by merely recognizing their nature, they arise and self-liberate simultaneously in the vast expanse of *Dharmakaya*, where Emptiness and Awareness are inseparable (*gsal stong gnyis med*).” From the Fruit and the Conduct arises the Secret *Upadesha* (*Mengagde*), or heart essence (*nyingthig*) teaching cycle.

**The Six Vajra Verses of Vairochana**

These *Three Essential Points* (*The Three Vajra Verses*) of the essence, nature and energy of the Base, and of the Path and Fruition of it is contained in Vairochana's early *Dzogchen* tantra, the *Six Vajra Verses*, or "Cuckoo of the State of Presence" (*Rig-pa'I khu-byug*), the luminous presence of intrinsic awareness (*rig pa*) that each one is. The cuckoo is the sacred bird of the *Bonpo* founder Shenrab Miwo and is considered in the aboriginal *Bon* tradition as the king of birds, harbinger of spring and bearer of wisdom from the vast empty space. These early *Six Vajra Verses* of Vairochana and all of the hundreds of *Dzogchen* tantras and texts that followed are but commentaries on Garab Dorje's *Three Vajra Verses* or *The Three Essential Statements* (or points).

**The Six Vajra Verses (translated by Chogyal Namkhai Norbu):**

**Verse 1 & 2: The Base (View):** The nature of phenomena is non-dual (*gnyis med*), but each one, its own state, is beyond the limits of the mind (*semde*, mind meditation series).

**Verse 3 & 4: The Path, Way of Practice (Meditation):** There is no concept that can define the condition of "what is," but vision nevertheless manifests: all is good (*longde*, space meditation series).

**Verse 5 & 6: The Fruit, Result, Way of Being in Action (Conduct):** Everything has already been accomplished, and so, having overcome the sickness of effort (spiritual seeking), one

finds oneself in the self-perfected state: this is the meditation, *mengagde/upasheda*, secret essence meditation series.

And from Jigme Lingpa, author of the *Longchen Nyingthig Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse*, on the nondual *Dzogchen* view at play in the world:

No Buddhas, no beings,  
beyond existence and non-existence  
Intrinsic Awareness Itself  
is absolute Guru, Ultimate Truth.  
By resting naturally, beyond fixation  
in that inherently free  
perfect innate Bodhi-mind,  
I take refuge and actualize Bodhicitta.

–Jigme Lingpa, *Longchen Nyingthig*

“The perfect explanation of *Dzogchen*,” according to Chögyal Namkhai Norbu is voiced in these profound words of Gautama Shakyamuni, our historical *Nirmanakaya* Buddha:

All that arises  
is essentially no more real  
than a reflection,  
transparently pure and clear,  
beyond all definition  
or logical explanation.  
Yet the seeds of past action,  
karma, continue to cause further arising.  
Even so, know that all that exists  
is ultimately void of self-nature,  
utterly nondual!

### **A Brief History of the Dzogchen Transmission**

The nature of mind is Buddha from the beginning.

–Garab Dorje

In Uddiyana (Orgyen) in the second century CE, **Garab Dorje** (b. 55 CE), the human historical founder of *Dzogchen*, in his *Sambhogakaya* form, transmitted the great *Dzogchen* teaching to his heart son **Manjushrimitra** (*The Three Essential Statements* or *Three Vajra Verses*) who then classified these texts (the *Dzogchen Nyingthig*) and transmitted them to **Srisimha** who then transmitted them to **Jnanasutra**, **Guru Padmasambhava**, (the *Khandro Nyingthig*), **Vimalamitra** (the *Vima Nyingthig*), and **Vairochana** (*The Cuckoo of the State of Presence*). Vimalamitra and Padmasambhava then brought the teaching from Uddiyana to Tibet in the

8th century CE, at the invitation of King Trisong Detsen. In the 14th century they were synthesized by **Longchenpa** (Longchen Rabjam 1308–1364) as the *Seven Treasuries (Dzodun)*, *The Trilogy of Finding Comfort and Ease*, *The Trilogy of Natural Freedom*, and *The Three Inner Essences*. In the 18th century **Jigme Ling Pa** (1730–1798) rediscovered the complete *Dzogchen Nyingthig*, including the above works, as a root mind *terma* (*gong ter*) and condensed its essence as the *Yonten Dzod* which is now known as the *Longchen Nyingthig* and is generally considered the authoritative expression of the Nyingma School's great *Dzogchen* tradition. *Nyingthig* means heartmind essence. Esoterically, the *Longchen Nyingthig*, the *Heart Essence of the Infinite Expanse* contains the precious heart essence of *Dzogchen*. It contains the innermost secret pith instructions, the *upadesha* (*mengagde*) and is transmitted from master to individual disciple directly, from heartmind to heartmind. The student prepares for this ultimate teaching by completing the foundational practices (*ngöndro*) before entering the secret pith instruction of the *mengagde* that includes the *Trekchö* and *Tögal* teaching cycles.

The *Nirmanakaya* Buddha Garab Dorje initially received the *Dzogchen* teaching as a direct transmission from the *Dharmakaya* Buddha **Samantabhadra** (*Kuntuzangpo*), the primordial *Adi* Buddhi, through the *Sambhogakaya* Buddha **Vajrasattva**, from whom emanates all spacetime historical (*Nirmanakaya*) Buddhas. Indeed, it is taught by some *Dzogchen* masters (Tulku Urgyen) that the ancient *Dzogchen* teaching was transmitted to Garab Dorje by the historical Buddha Shakyamuni (usually 563–483 BCE), the twelfth of the twelve great *Dzogchen* masters, in his *Sambhogakaya* form as Buddha Vajrasattva (Tulku Urgyen, 1995).

From a relative doxographic and historiographic view early historical *Nyingma Dzogchen* was formatively influenced primarily by the Indian Buddhist *tantras*, but also by Taoist *Ch'an*, indigenous Tibetan *Bon*, Tibetan Nestorian Christianity and Kashmiri *Shivaism* (Chogyal Namkhai Norbu 1996, Reynolds 1996).

The preceding is historiographic evidence based upon extant texts from the 8th through 10th centuries CE, and from recently discovered texts at *Tun Huang*, China (the *Rig Pa'i khu byug* and the *Bas Pa'i rgum chung*). However, according to certain *Dzogchen tantras* the *Dzogchen* lineage includes “the Twelve Teachers of *Dzogchen*” (Dodrupchen Rinpoche, *Tantric Doctrine According to the Nyingmapa School*). Not all of these masters were of the spacetime human realm. Some of these prehistoric teachers pre-date even the ancient *Nirmanakaya Bon Dzogchen* master Shenrab Miwoche (Tonpa Shenrab Miwo) who taught *Dzogchen* in *Olmo Lung ring* (Central Asia) circa 1600 BCE, long before the incarnation of the Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha (Namkhai Norbu, in Reynolds 1996). From there the teaching spread to Orgyen/*Zhang Zhung* and then Tibet. Indeed, the *Grathal gyur tantra*, and other texts teach that the great nondual primordial *Ati Dzogchen* teaching, by whatever name, has appeared in inhabited star systems throughout the *kosmos* for many *kalpas*, long before the appearance of our solar system, and will continue long after its death.

Thus it is, for the *Nyingmapa*, and many other Buddhists, and non-Buddhists, the nondual primordial *Dzogchen* teaching is the pinnacle of all spiritual teaching, and its view is therefore most relevant to the task of unifying the two seemingly incommensurable paradigms—Science and Spirit/spirituality—as we embark upon the new Noetic Revolution in religion, science and culture.