

Dzogchen and the Nine Vehicles of Enlightenment

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

—Shakyamuni, the Buddha (*Lankavatara Sutra*)

Sakyamuni Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama), the historical Buddha taught *sutras* (exoteric) and *tantras* (esoteric) for disciples of varying levels of understanding. Jesus and the great Chinese and Hindu *mahasiddhas* also taught in this manner. In the First Turning of the Wheel of the *Dharma* (at Sarnath) the Buddha elaborated *The Four Great Truths* and *The Eightfold Path*. It is generally agreed among Buddhist schools that the Buddha's teachings are properly classified into *The Three Vehicles (yanas)* of enlightenment: 1) the great foundational *Shravakayana* whose extant exemplars are the *Theravada* of Southeast Asia (the Pali Canon/*Tripitaka*), and *Shojo zen*; 2) the *Mayayana* (greater vehicle, that includes *Daijo* and *Saijojo zen*); and 3) the *Vajrayana* (diamond vehicle). Of these three vehicles, the *Nyingma* ("Ancient Ones") of the *Vajrayana* or Tibetan tantric tradition classifies these three teaching vehicles into The Nine Vehicles. **The key point of all nine vehicles is the tacit or express teaching of *shunyata* or luminous emptiness/boundlessness. Thus the essential nature of all of the arising phenomena of the spacetime dimension of Relative Truth (*samvriti satya*) is, broadly construed, Ultimate Truth (*paramartha satya*), *shunyata*, *dharmakaya*, *kadag*, the basal primordial reality ground of all appearance.** "There is a refinement of understanding that becomes progressively more subtle through the vehicles" (Tulku Urgyen).

The Foundational Vehicle (*Hinayana*): The first three vehicles of the Nine Vehicles of the *Nyingma* School consist of (1) the *Shravakayana*, the Vehicle of the Listeners, or Disciples, (2) the Vehicle of the Solitary Buddhas, (*Pratyekayana*) the way of solitary meditation, and 3) the *Bodhisattvayana*. In the luminous firmament of Buddhist saints, the *Pretyekabuddha* abides somewhere between the *Arhat* and a fully awakened Buddha.

The goal of the *Shravakayana* is to become an *Arhat* (saint), one who has accomplished liberation for oneself from the passions and ignorance of *samsara* through practice of the "three baskets", the *Tripitaka* (Pali Canon), namely the *Vinaya* (monastic life), *Sutra* study, and the metaphysics of the *Abhidharma*. It is through such practice, with its *shamatha*/mindfulness meditation and the introspective penetrating insight of *vipashyana* that the wild horse of the mind is gradually brought to rest. On the accord of Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche (1995), and many others, the *Shravakayana*, or so called *Hinayana* is not at all a "lesser vehicle" but is indeed the very foundation of all the later vehicles.

The Mahayana: The Third Vehicle, the Great or Causal Vehicle, the *Bodhisattvayana* (Vehicle of Enlightened Beings) is the way of those who seek or attain enlightenment for

the sake or intention of liberating not just oneself, but all sentient beings from the suffering (*dukkha*) of *samsara*, the wheel/cycle of conditioned existence. Thus it is known as the *Mahayana*, or greater vehicle to enlightenment. The goal of the path here is not individual salvation or Arhathood, but the development of the *bodhisattva* attitude or intention, compassionate service in healing the suffering of all sentient beings, and thus the aspiration to save all beings from the ignorance (*avidya*) and suffering of *samsaric* existence. The bodhisattva passes through nine stages or *bumhis* before accomplishing full Buddhahood. The ultimate "goal" of the *Mahayana* path is nothing less than Buddhahood.

The *Mahayana Sutras* (Vulture Peak Transmission) represent the 2nd and 3rd turnings of the Buddha's *Dharma Wheel* (*prajnaparamita*/perfection of wisdom, and Buddha nature teachings). Herein arose the *Madhyamaka* (the Middle Way) that through the wisdom of Shantarakshita (his *Madhyamakalamkara*) unified the middle way *Madhyamaka Prasangika* and *Yogachara* (mind-only) schools. Thus did the wisdom of emptiness of *Madhyamaka* and the Buddha nature of *Yogachara* become a unified *Madhyamaka* teaching. And this unified *Madhyamaka* is, according to H.H. the Dalai Lama, the very foundation of nondual *Dzogchen*, the pinnacle of all Nine Vehicles. Here the intrinsic nature of all reality is *shunyata* (luminous emptiness). And the inherent nature of all beings arising through this basal emptiness ground is Buddha nature (*Tathagatagarbha*, Jap. *Bussho*). "Through the primordial wisdom of emptiness we realize our inherent Buddha nature. Through our indwelling Buddha nature we realize the compassionate wisdom of emptiness" (H.H. the Dalai Lama). These two together—the wisdom of emptiness—with its spontaneous compassionate activity, and our inherent Buddha nature—are the causes of both relative, and in due course, ultimate human liberation/happiness.

This great teaching of the *Mahayana* "Causal Vehicle" appears in slightly different forms as the nondual *Madhyamaka* of the Definitive Meaning, and in nondual *Saijojo* Zen (*mujodo no taigen*). In China the *Mahayana* flourished in the *Ch'an* (transported to Japan as Zen by Eisai and Dogen, circa 1200), and Pure Land (*ching-t'u*, Jap., *jodo*) schools.

The *Shravakayana/Hinayana* and the *Mahayana* together comprise the *Sutra* System.

The Vajrayana (Mantrayana), or acausal "Fruitional Vehicle", the collective (outer/lower and inner/higher *tantras*) teachings of the Indo-Tibetan *tantras* (*tantra* system or *mantra* system) are said to have been transmitted to us by Vajrasattva (*Sambhogakaya* Buddha through that very aspect of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha). The *vajra* (Sanskrit) or *dorje* (Tibetan) means diamond and symbolizes the adamant, radiant, indestructible inherent nature of all beings. The realization of this primordial wisdom (gnosis, *jnana*, *yeshe*) presence (*vidya/rigpa/shekina/epinoia/christos*) is liberation from the ignorance and suffering that this mortal flesh is heir to.

The Outer/Lower Tantras comprise the 4th 5th and 6th of the nine Nyingma Vehicles. The 4th Vehicle, *Kriya Tantra* is exoteric. *Charya Tantra* (*Yogachara/Chittamatra* Mind Only, the 5th Vehicle), is esoteric. The 6th Vehicle, the *Yogatantra* practice is esoteric but

still dualistic. It is said that the lower *tantras* were transmitted to those of lesser capacity, the higher *tantras* to those of greater capacity.

The Inner/Higher Tantras of the old *Nyingma* tradition are the three highest vehicles (vehicles 7, 8 and 9): *Mahayoga* (development stage), *Anuyoga* (completion stage), and *Atiyoga* (*Dzogchen*, perfection stage). More recent *Vajrayana* traditions (9th and 10th centuries), namely *Sakya*, *Kagyu* and *Gelug* utilize the *Anuttara Tantras*: Father *tantras* (lunar, *upaya*, clarity), Mother *tantras* (solar, *prajna*, clear light, *kundalini* energy, emptiness) and the non-dual *Advityayoga tantras*. The highest or most subtle of the *Anuttara tantras* is nondual *Essence Mahamudra* of the *Kagyu* School. The highest and most direct nondual vehicle of the *Nyingma* tradition is *Atiyoga*, (*Dzogchen* or *Dzogpa chenpo*, [Skt. *Mahasandi*], the Great Perfection).

The nondual view of *Dzogchen* is, we are told, nearly identical to nondual *Essence Mahamudra* teaching of the *Kagyu* school, and to the nondual Supreme Vehicle of Zen (*Saijojo*), and to the nondual teaching of the *Great Madhyamaka of the Definitive Meaning*. It is taught by *Dzogchen* master Tulku Urgyn Rinpoche (1995) and other non-sectarian (*rime*) masters that this great *Madhyamaka* teaching is the ultimate nondual view of the *Nirmanakaya*; *Essence Mahamudra* is the ultimate nondual view of the *Sambhogakaya*; and *Dzogchen (Ati yoga)* is the ultimate nondual view of the *Dharmakaya*. Further, the Base (*gzhi*, source, ground) is the *Mahamudra*, the Path is the *Great Madhyamaka* of the Middle Way, and *Dzogchen* is the Fruit or result (liberation, enlightenment and Buddhahood).

With the advent of this ecumenical non-sectarian *rime* movement of the 19th century many *Kagyu*, *Sakya* and *Gelug* as well as *Nyingma* masters practice and teach *Dzogchen*, the Great Perfection. And many *Dzogchen* masters are lineage holders of the *Mahamudra* of the *Kagyu* school. In *Dzogchen*, *shamatha* (quiescence) and *vipasyana* (introspective penetrating insight) meditation are united. The mind awake is the unity of *shamatha*/mindfulness and *vipasyana*/penetrating insight.

In the Mahayana, in the supreme vehicle of *Saijojo* Zen this same unity is practiced as *shikan-taza*, the zazen of the unity of stillness with insight (direct seeing/*kensho/satori*). Sectarian bias in the beginning or advanced practitioner of any of these great nondual paths may derail the practice. Yet, one must commit to and practice a specific path, under the guidance of a master lineage holder.

This non-sectarian *rime* intention that arose within Tibetan and Mahayana Buddhism is now occurring in all of the great wisdom traditions. The recent and living masters of this Great Tradition of humankind have agreed to transmit the secret nondual teaching of their various traditions to all of those willing to prepare, then receive. Without this, the great primordial teaching will be lost. **Indeed, the transmission of this supreme teaching from the living lineage holders of our entire Great Wisdom Tradition is the fundamental process and result of what I have elsewhere termed the emerging global Noetic Revolution in religion, science and culture** ("Being the Whole: Toward the Emerging Noetic Revolution", www.davidpaulboaz.org).

A Very Brief History of the *Dzogchen* Transmission

“Without teaching anything the teaching appears for all beings.”

—*Do de yong su kod pa*

In Uddiyana (Orgyen) in the second century BCE, **Garab Dorje**, the human historical founder of *Dzogchen*, in his *Sambhogakaya* form, transmitted the great *Dzogchen* teaching to **Manjusrimitra** (*The Three Essential Statements* or *Three Vajra Verses*) who then classified the tantric texts (the *Dzogchen Nyingthig*, the five series) and transmitted them to **Srisimha** who transmitted them to **Jnanasutra**, **Guru Padmasambhava**, (the *Khadro Nyingthig*), **Vimalamitra** (the *Vimala Nyingthig*), and **Vairochana** (*The Six Vajra Verses*) who then brought them from Uddiyana to Tibet in the 8th century CE. In the 14th century they were synthesized by the Tibetan second Buddha, **Longchenpa** (Longchen Rabjam 1308-1363) into a unified system, the *Seven Treasures* (*Dzodun*).

In the eighteenth century **Jigme Lingpa** (1730-1798) rediscovered the complete *Dzogchen Nyingthig*, including Longchenpa's *Seven Treasures*, as a root mind *terma* (*gong ter*) and condensed its essence as the *Yonten Dzod* which is known as the *Longchen Nyingthig* and is generally considered the authoritative expression of the great *Dzogchen* tradition. *Nyingthig* means great heart-essence or unbounded vast heart-expanse. Esoterically, the *Longchen Nyingthig* contains the precious heart essence of *Dzogchen*. It contains the innermost secret pith instructions or *upadesha* and is transmitted directly from master to prepared individual student, without dependence on scripture (*lung*).

Garab Dorje initially received the *Dzogchen* teachings as a direct transmission from the *dharmakaya*, represented by **Samantabhadra** (Tib., *Kuntuzangpo*), the primordial dharmakaya *Adi* Buddha, through the *Sambhogakaya* aspect of Buddha **Vajrasattva**, from whom emanates all historical (*Nirmanakaya*) Buddhas. Indeed, it is taught by some *Nyingma* masters (Tulku Urgyen, et.al.) that this ancient *Dzogchen* teaching was transmitted to Garab Dorje by Buddha Shakyamuni (b. 563 BCE), the twelfth of the twelve great *Dzogchen* masters, in his *sambhogakaya* form as Vajrasattva (Tulku Urgyen, 1995).

From an exoteric historiographic view (relative truth), early *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* (Namkhai Norbu 1984 and in Reynolds 1989; Dowman 1996).

The preceding is approximate historic fact based upon extant texts from the eighth through tenth centuries CE, including 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 (*ringyu*) includes "the Twelve Teachers of *Dzogchen*" (Dodupchen Rinpoche, *Tantric Doctrine According to the Nyingmapa School*). Not all of these masters were of the spacetime human realm. These prehistoric teachers pre-date even the ancient *Bon Dzogchen* master Shenrab Miwoche (Tonpa Shenrab Miwo) who taught *Dzogchen* in *Olmo Lung ring* (Central Asia) *circa* 1600 BCE, long before the incar-

nation of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha (Namkhai Norbu, in Reynolds 1989). From there the teaching spread to *Zhang Zhung* and Tibet. Indeed, the *Grathal gyur tantra* (*upadesha*), and other texts state that the great nondual *Dzogchen* teaching, by whatever name, has appeared in inhabited star systems throughout the *kosmos* for many *kalpas*, before the appearance of our solar system, and will continue after its death. Meanwhile, our purpose is to practice, realize then express it today, here, now.

The Nondual Wisdom of the Clear Light

The essence of all the Buddhas exists prior to *samsara* and *nirvana*, beyond transmigration and liberation. As 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... Its essence is the purity of original emptiness... Its nature is self-perfection... Clarity of light is the pure nature of emptiness... which is the immutable state of *dharmakaya*... Similar to space it pervades all beings... The inseparability of the two truths, absolute and relative, is called 'the primordial Buddha'... In the condition of the base there is no duality... When its primordial energy manifests it becomes the common ground of liberation and delusion... If at the moment the energy of the base manifests, one does not consider it something other than oneself, and one recognizes one's own state as the indivisibility of essence, nature and energy, the movement of energy self-liberates... Understanding the essence that is the very nature of primordial enlightenment, one finds oneself always in this state: this is called 'Samantabhadra' or 'Immutable Light'... the 'Primordial Lord'... dwelling in the fourth time, beyond past, present and future... the infinite space of self-perfection... this is the pure *dharmakaya* dimension, the essence of the vajra of clear light, that also contains the dimensions of Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya.

—Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, from *The Supreme Source*, 1999

The Three Essential Statements Which Strike The Essence (The Three Vajra Verses of Garab Dorje)

Upon receiving the last testament transmission from Garab Dorje of *The Three Essential Statements*, Manjusrimitra classified them into the three continuous aspects of *Dzogchen* and the three corresponding teaching series:

1. The Base: Recognize your own true nature. Direct transmission or introduction of the state of presence of one's Original Buddha Nature by the master. This is the *Dzogchen View* upon which the *semde* mind series is based.

2. **The Path: Choose the state of presence.** Direct discovery of the state of presence (*rig pa*), beyond doubt. This is the *Dzogchen Meditation* upon which the *longde* space series is based.

3. **The Fruit/Result: Continue in the state with confidence in liberation** (total realized integration of the primordial base or ground in the everyday lifeworld). This is the *Dzogchen Conduct* upon which the *mengagde* secret *upadesha* series is based.

These three statements distill all of the *Dzogchen tantras* and wisdom (compare these with the *Four Statements of Zen*).

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 its Fruition is contained in Vairochana's very early *Dzogchen* tantra, the *Six Vajra Verses*, or "Cuckoo of the State of Presence" (*Rig-pa'i khu-byug*) of the Buddha potential that each individual is, the luminous presence of intrinsic awareness (*rigpa*) itself. The cuckoo is the sacred bird of the *Bonpo* founder Shenrab Miwo and is considered in the aboriginal Tibetan *Bon* tradition as the king of birds, har-binger of spring and bearer of wisdom from the vast empty sky. *The Six Vajra Verses* of Vairochana and all of the hundreds of *Dzogchen* tantras are but commentaries on Garab Dorje's *Three Vajra Verses*, or *The Three Essential Points*.

The Six Vajra Verses (translated by 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 (The Meditation): There is no concept that can define the condition of "what is," but vision nevertheless manifests: all is good (*longde*, space meditation series).

Verses 5 & 6: The Fruit, Result, Way of Being in Action (The Conduct): Everything has already been accomplished, and so, having overcome the sickness of effort (seeking), one finds oneself in the self-perfected state: This is contemplation. (*mengagde/upadesha*, secret essence meditation series).

Purport

The Base (*gzhi*) by direct transmission (*semde*): Introduce the state of *rig pa* directly (*ngosprod*), by transmission from the vajra master. **The View:** recognize and practice your own primordial nature which is Buddha nature, the source of all arising. This is the development or "understanding" (*rtogs pa, avabodhi*) phase of the *Dzogchen* teaching.

The Path (*longde*): "Don't remain in doubt" ("choose the state of presence"). The Meditation (*gompa*): "Decide on one point." Choose and use the realization of the nondual unity of emptiness and awareness that is the nature and essence of the three *kayas*. This

does not mean choose the *Dzogchen* Path. That is dogmatic dualistic view. Rather, choose the state of presence, moment to moment, here, now. Do not remain in dualistic, spacetime located meditation on emptiness. Choose to be the vast empty space of the nondual primordial state. Thus is the primordial state of presence of the base/ground stabilized through practice of the Path. This is the “stabilizing” (*brtan pa*) phase of the *Dzogchen* teaching.

The Fruit/Result (integration, *mengagde*, or secret *upadesha*, *nyingthig*): Continue in profound confidence (*gdeng*) of the certainty of the wisdom of the basal emptiness ground state that is self-liberation. **The Conduct:** Liberation (*grol ba*) is prior to meditation. The state of presence or contemplation is “already accomplished” (Garab Dorje) as thoughts arise and spontaneously self liberate (*rang grol*). No effort. No seeking strategies. All thought and emotion, all arising is already primordially or universally liberated (*ta-drol*). Wise, compassionate conduct spontaneously, effortlessly arises and continues from stable confidence, certainty, in the luminous emptiness of the “supreme source” that is the unbounded whole (*mahabindu*) of nondual reality itself (*dharmata*). Thus is the prior unity of this state of presence with the arising energy of inner and outer phenomenal experience realized, then compassionately expressed. Again, this is the “integrating” or completion (*bsre ba*) phase of the *Dzogchen* path.

The *semde* and *longde* teaching is derived from the *kama* or oral tradition, which became the *tantras* and *agamas* (*lung*), while the *mengagde* or *nyingthig*, the Innermost Secret Heart Essence teaching series is primarily *terma*, “rediscovered earth and mind treasures.” Each of the teaching series is complete in itself, has its own development and completion stage, and may lead to self-liberation, and integration into the lifeworld of the nondual primordial state of absolute *bodhicitta*, the subtle seed (*thigle, bindu*) of Buddhahood that is the luminous empty source ground of all the manifestations of energy in the *kosmos*, “always already” awake at the human heart (*hridayam*). However, according to Longchenpa and Jigme Lingpa, *mengagde* is the superior teaching for it is the least conceptual and most direct. Indeed it is heartmind to heartmind transmission directly from master to prepared student, with no dependence on scripture. The secret *mengagde upadesha* then, is the supreme teaching of the *Dzogchen* teaching series.

Ati yoga is the supreme vehicle, the peak of all yogas and the mother of all Buddhas... because it discloses in detail the meaning of the spontaneous and natural perfection of all the infinite phenomena... recognized directly, without intervention by the conceptual mind... [all] within the dimension of the single sphere of self-arising wisdom.

—Nubchen Sangye Yeshe, devotee of Padmasambhava
(from the *Sämtten Migdrön*, translated by Namkhai Norbu)

H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche's Comments on Garab Dorje's Three Vajra Verses, or The Three Statements (translated by John Reynolds):

Verse I: Recognize your own true nature (The Base) "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 (*ye-shes*) that is self-originated intrinsic awareness (*rig-pa*)."

Verse II: Choose the state of presence (The Path) "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."

Verse III: Continue in the state with confidence in liberation (The Fruit) "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*)."

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 contemporary *Dzogchen* master 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.