

**The Nature of Mind: The Buddhist View  
Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen**

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# The Nature of Mind: The Buddhist View\*

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

- Shakyamuni, the Buddha

## Introduction

We have seen in Chapter I how in the second century CE two great scholar-masters, Nagarjuna in the East and Plotinus in the West, began the Non-Dual Revolution in our great Perennial Wisdom Tradition that is just now emerging as the New Reformation of the 21st Century. As the developmental dialectic of our species' emotional-spiritual evolution proceeds, and the epistemological and ontological estrangement of the present modern-postmodern worldview recedes, this incipient global reformation in religion, science and culture has gently reintroduced to humankind an interior, integral and transpersonal knowledge paradigm, discoverable through the contemplative injunctions of the spiritual paths of our Great Tradition. These teachings have, at last, been introduced into Western cognitive science and neuroscience to help solve the "hard problem" of the "explanatory gap" between exterior objective physical brain (third person data) and the arising of subjective awareness states (interior first person data). This is the basic question of the root relation of perceiving subject to its object. Consciousness (first person states) supervenes upon brain processes, but how? The "irreducibility of consciousness" precludes a naive reduction of consciousness to purely physical (third person) brain states. This emerging "new science of consciousness" is an urgent juncture in the perennial "mind-body problem," and is a precursor to a truly integral noetic science of mind.

But more importantly, our Great Wisdom Tradition offers the immediate antidote to that prior, *really* hard mind-body problem of the primordial split between the objective finite existence of our bodymind, and our perfectly subjective infinite sourceground, the ultimate nature of mind. It is this primary, separative dualism that is the root cause of human evil, the egocentric, then ethnocentric and gendercentric ignorance that is fear, anger and aggression—and their horrible result—war, genocide and despair.

The emerging New Reformation in religion, science and culture is nothing less than a global consciousness shift toward the light. This unfolding developmental/evolutionary phase transition is the direct result of the decision, during the past century, by recent and living masters of the primary Eastern wisdom traditions—Buddhism, Vedanta, Taoism, Sufism—to transmit their secret non-dual view and profound contemplative yogic

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technologies (first person data) to prepared teachers and students in both the West and the East.

The masters of the three times (past, present and future) have told it: realization of the perfectly subjective ultimate Nature of Mind — the happiness that cannot be lost — abides in our relationship to the infinite, that essential interdependence between our painful finite existence, and this aware numinous matrix of all being. This is “The Bright” of the old Vedas, innermost presence of the great perfection that is our Supreme Source. Our Great Tradition teaches that it is this infinite primordial womb, utterly ineffable non-dual Spirit Itself that embraces, enfolds and in whom arises all unfolding finite appearing spacetime reality, including we beings who experience and try to understand it. And wonder of wonders, That (*Tat*) is who we actually are — our Supreme Identity — undreamt of in the thoughtful slumber of human reason and belief. What then, is the Buddhist view of the path to this already perfect presence of ultimate happiness? And what do the esoteric and the non-dual Buddhist views contribute to the resolution of our ultimate “hard problem,” the actualization of this essential Mind Nature within each individual as we participate together in the emerging “Age of Synthesis?”

### **Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen**

The *Vajrayana*, The Tibetan Buddhist *Mahayana* vehicle consists of the *Kagyü*, *Sakya* and *Gelug* Schools and are referred to as the New Translation Tantra Schools (*Sarma*) that developed after the translations of Rinchen Sangpo (958-1055), during the time of Atisha and Marpa. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has shown that the view and basic structure of these schools are essentially the same as the Indian Middle Way Consequence School (*Madhyamaka Prasangika*) of Chandrakirti (7th century), that “perfect harmony between the teachings on emptiness and the teachings on the clear light.” This sutra school evolved from Nagarjuna’s 2nd Century *Madhyamaka (Uma)*, the great *Mahayana* development stage teaching of the Two Truths (relative-empirical and absolute) that grew from the ancient *Pali Canon* (The *Tripitaka*, 4th Century B.C.E.) that continued the august tradition of the *Vedas* and *Vedanta* — the *Sanatana Dharma* or Hindu religious complex. This Middle Way teaching then entered China with Bodhidharma (c.521 C.E.), the twenty-eighth patriarch of Indian Buddhism and the first patriarch of the Ch’an/Zen tradition. In China, Indian *Mahayana* Buddhism blended with the Taoism of the *T’ang* and *Sung* periods to give rise to *Ch’an* and *T’ien T’ai* in the 6th century. In the late 12th century *Ch’an* entered Japan with Eisai and Dōgen, founders of the Rinzai and Soto zen schools, respectively. *T’ien T’ai* entered Japan (*Tendai*) with Saicho in the 8th century. This great Chinese tradition is expressed in the *Chinese Canon* (983). The *Madhyamaka* teaching also entered Tibet in the 8th century with Shantirakshita, Kamalashila and in the Shambhala teaching of Padmasambhava, “The Second Buddha.” It reached its pinnacle through the translation and transmission of Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), the founder of the Dalai Lama’s *Gelug* School in the 14th century. This Tibetan tradition of the Buddha’s teaching is voiced in the *Tibetan Canon* (1742). The 19th and 20th century Tibetan non-sectarian *rime* movement

further developed and aligned the Buddhist Middle Way teaching with the non-dual views of the highest tantras of both the New Translation Schools (Highest Yoga Tantra), and the earlier *Nyingma* School (*Dzogchen*).

. . . the basic thought of *Ga-gyu*, *Sa-gya*, and *Ge-luk* is the same with respect to the philosophical views in that they are all of the Middle Way Consequence School.

- H.H. The Dalai Lama (*Kindness, Clarity and Insight*, 1984).

**Dharma in a Cold Climate: the Supreme Teaching.** But what of the Secret Mantra translations of this earlier Tibetan dissemination, the Old Translation School of *Nyingma*, with its supreme non-dual teaching of *Dzogchen*, The Great Perfection? This ancient teaching dates back to its historical founder, Garab Dorje (Prahevajra) in 2nd century C.E. Uddiyana (Orgyan). From there it spread to Zhang Zhung, and in the 8th century to Tibet with Vairochana and Padmasambhava. According to Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, certain *Dzogchen* (Skt. *Mahasandi*) tantras reveal that the *Dzogchen* lineage includes the “Twelve Teachers of *Dzogchen*” (see Dodrupchen Nyima’s primary text, *Tantric Doctrine According to the Nyingmapa School*), prehistoric masters some of whom pre-date even the ancient *Bön Dzogchen* master Shenrab Miwoche who taught in Olmo Lung ring *circa* 1600 B.C.E. Indeed, the *Grathal gyur Tantra* and other texts state that the great non-dual *Ati Dzogchen* teaching, by whatever name, has arisen in inhabited star systems for many *kalpas*, and will endure long after the earth and its sun have passed. In our star system its innermost secret teaching—*mengagde/upadesha*—is considered by many Buddhist masters to be the quintessential non-dual teaching.

According to His Holiness, who bases his analysis in part upon the definitive teaching of the aforementioned *Nyingma* Master, the Third Dodrupchen Jigme Tenpe Nyima (1865-1926), the tantric view of *Dzogchen*, and the Middle Way of sutra and the lower tantras are not essentially the same, although the practices of the path are similar and its Result or Fruit—Buddhahood— is the same (H.H. The Dalai Lama, *Dzogchen*, 2000). However, the view of the highest, non-dual teaching of both the New Translation Schools—*Anuttara Yogatantra* or Highest Yoga Tantra with its *Essence Mahamudra* practice—and the Old Translation School’s *Dzogchen* do come to the same essential point.

The substance of all these paths comes down to the fundamental innate mind of clear light. Even the sutras . . . have this same fundamental mind as the basis of their thought in their discussion of the Buddha nature, although the full mode of its practice is not described as it is in the systems of Highest Yoga Tantra.

- H.H. The Dalai Lama (1984)

How then, do the highest tantric teachings of the ancient school’s *Dzogchen*, and of the New Translation School’s *Essence Mahamudra* differ from the sutra view of the Middle Way of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti, and how are they the same? Is there an essential difference between Buddhist sutra and tantra? Between tantra and *Ati Dzogchen*? For

these answers we must first look to the Buddha's Three Turnings of the Wheel of the Dharma.

**The Triyana: Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma, One Path.** Shakyamuni (Gautama Siddhartha) the historical Buddha (*circa* 485-405 B.C.E.) transmitted exoteric/outer, esoteric/inner, and highest non-dual or greater esoteric ("innermost secret") teaching for followers and disciples of different levels of understanding. The *mahasiddhas* of our great Perennial Wisdom Tradition have generally taught in this exoteric/esoteric "two ways at once."

The teachings of the Buddha are usually classified into *The Three Vehicles (yanas) of Enlightenment—The Triyana*. These "three Turnings" present one dharma or one path with differing views. We need the "right view" for our present lifestage understanding. The Three Vehicles include the Fundamental Vehicle or the *Hinayana* (*Sautrantika* and *Vaibhashika* tenet systems) of the Pali School that flourishes today in Southeast Asia alongside the *Theravada*, and throughout the world in *Shojo* Zen of both the *Soto* and *Rinzai* schools; the *Mahayana* or Great Vehicle (the Causal Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas or *Bodhisattvayana*) of India, China and Japan (*Daijo* and non-dual *Saijojo* zen), and includes the Emptiness of *Madhyamaka* and the Buddha Nature of the *Yogachara* (*Chittamatra*/ Mind Only) tenet systems; and finally the *Vajrayana* or Diamond Vehicle, the Tibetan translation and transmission of the *Mahayana*. This is Buddha's third turning of the Wheel of the Dharma. It includes the subtlest tantric teachings, *Dzogchen* and Highest Yoga Tantra.

The old *Nyingma* School classifies these same teachings of the Buddha into the *Nine Vehicles of Enlightenment*. The first three are the *Shravakayana* (listeners or disciples), the *Pratyekayana* or the vehicle of the *Pratyekabuddhas* (the Way of Solitary Awakening), and the *Mahayana* or Great Vehicle. These three vehicles comprise the *Sutra Tradition* or the Outer Vehicle. The Inner Vehicle or *Tantric Tradition* is classified into three Outer Tantras (*Kriya* Tantra, *Carya* Tantra and *Yoga* Tantra), and the development (creation) and completion stages of the three Inner Tantras (*Mahayoga*, *Anuyoga*, and *Atiyoga* or *Dzogchen*). *Dzogchen* is the great completion and perfection lifestage wisdom teaching that transcends yet includes all of the teachings of the previous vehicles. "There is a refinement of understanding that becomes progressively more subtle through the vehicles" (Tulku Urgyen), culminating in the highest non-dual teachings of both Old and New Translation Schools—*Dzogchen*, and Highest Yoga Tantra (*Essence Mahamudra*) respectively.

It is sometimes said that the Buddha taught many contradictory doctrines. But it is not so. Although interpretations will differ and texts may be deconstructed, we must remember that through all the vehicles the skillful means (*upaya*) of the Buddha's teaching varies in subtlety and depth according to the capacity of his listeners. "In order to lead living beings to understanding I taught all the different *yanas* . . ." (Shakyamuni, the Buddha, *Lankavatara Sutra*).

In the First Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, in the Deer Park at Sarnath, the Buddha taught on karma, and the Four Noble Truths that are the interdependent unity of *samsara* and *nirvana*. Here he taught the great truth of "no-self" (*anatman*, *rangtong*, emptiness of self), the transcendence of ego-I that is the foundation of all that was to come.

It is this great truth of *anatman* that gradually deconstructs our attachment to the sense of self, and to its impermanent world of phenomena (*shentong*, emptiness of other).

All the evil, fear and suffering of this world  
is the result of attachment to the self.

- Shantideva

These primary teachings comprise the *Hinayana*, the “Common Vehicle” of the “listeners.”

In the Second Turning of the Wheel, at Rajagriha on Vulture Peak, the Buddha taught the Great Vehicle, the *Mahayana*, the subtler truth of the Great Emptiness (*Mahashunyata*), the Great Compassion (*Mahakaruna*) —ultimate bodhicitta and the relative bodhicitta that flows from it—and the Three Buddha Bodies that are the unity of the *Trikaya* (*nirmanakaya*, *sambhogakaya*, *dharmakaya*). It is the development of bodhicitta—the wish and the action that promotes the liberation from suffering for all sentient beings that is the defining motivation of the Mahayana path.

And all this is embodied in the *Prajnaparamita Sutra of Transcendent Wisdom*—the perfection of the transcendent wisdom that is the ultimate realization of emptiness that is the realization of no-self, and the final cessation of suffering (*nirvana*). Here we discover the prior unity of the “Two Truths” (*denpa nyis*)—ultimate and relative, definitive and provisional—the Middle Way between the extreme views of existence (both relative and eternal, *i.e.* eternalism), and non-existence (solipsism, atheism, *i.e.* nihilism). Thus in the *Heart Sutra* we hear: “Form is emptiness; emptiness is also form. Emptiness is no other than form; form is no other than emptiness.” It is this great transcendent wisdom that is “the mother of the four noble beings: the Arhats of the Shravakayana, the Pratyekabuddha Arhats, the Bodhisattvas and the Buddhas.

In his final and subtlest, deepest teaching, the Third Turning of the *Dharma chakra*, the Buddha revealed that all beings are inherently endowed with “Buddha Nature” (*tathagatagarbha*), the indwelling capacity for the realization or enlightenment (*bodhi*) that is, paradoxically, always already present—the heartseed of perfect presence within the spiritual heart of every being. It is this perfect primordial purity, utterly undefiled by any thought or action, that is our natural, original state of buddhahood, the fundamental nature of mind. And from the direct experience of this luminous awareness flows his supreme teaching that emptiness is not merely a negation of phenomenal reality, but that the “nature of mind is clear light.” And this is the *Vajrayana* or Fruitional Vehicle—the path to ultimate realization and fruition of the prior unity of the provisional and definitive meanings of the Two Truths and the Three Buddha Bodies of the highest non-dual tantras of the Great *Mahayana* Vehicle. . . Therefore, the ultimate nature of mind is not mere emptiness, but “the nature of mind is the unity of awareness and emptiness.” This prior unity is the vast expanse of undifferentiated, luminous primordial awareness, the boundless luminosity of the clear light that is completely free of any fabricated object through or emotion. Thus, just as the vast expanse of sky cannot be obstructed by storm clouds, so our stainless primordial Buddha nature cannot be tainted by such adventitious

phenomena. It is from this essential, perfectly subjective emptiness base (*gzhi*), this Supreme Source (*kunjed gylpo*) in whom all objective and subjective phenomena arise and participate.

### One Ground, Two Truths, Three Bodies

Emptiness of mind is not a state of mind, but the original essence of mind. . . our original mind that includes everything within itself.

-Suzuki Roshi

What then, shall we do with this precious life we've been given? The main point of all the vehicles of the Buddhist Path is the implicit or express wisdom teaching of the prior unity of the Great Emptiness (*mahashunyata*), The Great Compassion (*mahakaruna*) and our inherent Buddha nature. As we have seen, the essential nature of all dependently arisen phenomenal physical and mental appearance is the vast expanse of the Great Emptiness. And this emptiness is not in any way separate from Ultimate Compassion. Thus, from this great wisdom understanding and experience of emptiness spontaneously arises everyday lifeworld relative compassion for all unenlightened beings, and relative devotion to the master, but also to all enlightened beings (*vidyadhara/rigzin*) of the three times (past, present, future). Then, this compassion and devotion enhance understanding of luminous emptiness. The *practice* of the spiritual path includes and develops both this wisdom of *ultimate* emptiness, and the purifying intention and motivation of *relative* compassion-devotion that arises therefrom. Our Perennial Wisdom Tradition knows this unity of basic space (Emptiness, Tao) and compassion as the *Wisdom of Kindness* (*karuna, ahimsa, hesed/charis*). All the masters have taught it. Without this view and action, spiritual practice becomes some species of spiritual materialism. Through this view and practice lies our purpose, the cause of ultimate happiness.

Compassion is the "mind of enlightenment" — the loving *intention*, in thought and conduct, of *bodhicitta* — the great "mind of light" of a buddha. "The practice of unification of emptiness and compassion is the basis of the path" (Jamgön Kongtrül, *Lamrim Yeshe Nyingpo*). "The true path of the Buddhas is the unity of means (*upaya*) and knowledge (*prajna*)" (Tulku Urgyen, *Repeating the Words of the Buddha*, 1996). Enlightenment, our ultimate happiness, rests in step-by-step compassionate activity (*Apramana*, The Four Immeasurables or Four Boundless States), the relative-conventional means or method that is the expression in action of the spontaneous lived wisdom (*prajna/sherab*) that realizes (*jnana/yeshe*) the Great Emptiness (*Mahashunyata*) of *Madhyamaka*. And this emptiness is none other than the buddha nature of *Yogachara*. According to the Dalai Lama, there is no *essential* difference between these "two wisdoms" — between emptiness (*shunyata*), and buddha nature (*tathagatagarbha*). Realizing emptiness we realize our buddha nature. Realizing our innate buddha nature, we realize emptiness. The great teaching of no-self (*anatman*), impermanence (*anitya*) and interdependent arising (*pratitya samutpada*) are unified in these two wisdoms. Such is the prior unity of Buddha's Three Turnings of the

Wheel of the Dharma.

So our perceptually imputed and conceptually and emotionally designated *provisional meaning*, the spacetime reality of the relative-conventional empirical truths (*samvriti satya*) of phenomenal reality arise from the emptiness of the luminous Ground or Source—empirically—but are not *ultimately* findable under scientific, philosophical or *noetic* (mind-spirit) epistemological and ontological analysis. Therefore, such spacetime reality is necessarily empty (*shunya*) of inherent existence or self-nature, even though such arising phenomena are undeniably “real” by our intersubjective and interobjective conventional agreement (Chapter I). Indeed, twenty-five hundred years of our Great Perennial Wisdom’s intertheoretical, metaphysical and scientific analytic scrutiny—in both West and East—has revealed absolutely no *permanent, independently* existing phenomenal particulars or *things*—no enduring or eternal concrete physical or mental objects, selves, or souls (present company excluded, of course). Postmodern, postclassical scientific theory—the varieties of the quantum theory—is essentially in agreement with this view. Yeshe Tsogyal, the great female Buddha expresses it definitively:

Since life is conditioned by time, it has no permanence.  
Since objects of the senses are but relative perceptions,  
they have no ultimate existence.  
Since the spiritual path is filled with delusion,  
it has no essential reality.  
Since the ground of everything is ultimately non-dual,  
it has no solidity.  
Since mind is only thinking, it has no basis or ground.  
Therefore, I find no thing that ultimately exists.

- Yeshe Tsogyal

If no thing ultimately exists, and if all objective and subjective phenomena are ultimately “unfindable,” we must ask, how is it that they *appear* to exist.

The question is not *whether* they exist but *how* they exist. They exist, but not in the manner in which we perceive them. They lack any discrete, intrinsic reality. This absence, or emptiness, of inherent existence is their ultimate nature. . . It is critical to understand that *Madhyamika* does not say that things are absent of inherent existence mainly because they cannot be found when sought through critical analysis. This is not the full argument. Things and events are said to be absent of inherent or intrinsic existence because *they exist only in dependence on other factors*. . . In other words, anything that depends on other factors is devoid of its own independent nature, and this absence of an independent nature is emptiness. . . Nagarjuna says that things and events, which are dependently originated, are empty, and thus are also dependently designated. . . [He] concludes there is nothing that is not empty, for there is nothing that is not dependently originated. Here we see the equation between dependent origination and emptiness. . . the path of the Middle Way, which

transcends the extremes of absolutism and nihilism.

- H.H. the Dalai Lama, *Buddhadharma*, Winter 2004, p.20

The true and ultimate nature and source of all relative empirical appearance therefore, is pregnant luminous emptiness (not void, empty nothingness), Ultimate or Absolute Truth (*paramartha satya*), the *definitive meaning* that is the “ultimate mode of existing of everything” — *Tathata* or *Dharmata*. Astonishingly, this luminous emptiness is intrinsically aware! And therein lives the cognition/awareness/ consciousness that all sentient beings participate in, whether or not they realize it. And this is our immediate potential for enlightenment — Buddha Nature, Christ Nature, Tao, Zen, Brahman — inherent within all self-aware beings. *Tat tvam asi. That we are!*

Moreover, we may utilize the *Sutrayana* discriminating wisdom (*sherab/prajna/ sophia*) of relative empirical truth as method (*upaya*) to recognize, then realize the *tantrayana* non-dual transcendent Primordial Awareness Wisdom (*yeshe/jnana/ gnosis*) that is Ultimate Truth. *Upaya* is Ultimate Truth *acting* wisely, skillfully and compassionately in the everyday world of spacetime relative-conventional truth. It is this Middle Way teaching of the unity of these Two Truths of the Buddha that extends through all the vehicles of the *Dharmachakra*. But, according to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, these vehicles (*yanas*) differ as to the subtlety or depth of their views and meditation on emptiness, on the clear light, and on the altruistic intention of *bodhicitta*. So the views of emptiness in sutra and tantra are the same, and they are different. How is this apparent contradiction resolved?

**Emptiness, Objective and Subjective.** Let us now consider the *Tantrayana* distinction between objective and subjective emptiness.

So from the point of view of objective emptiness we can say that there is no difference between sutra and tantra with regard to the view of emptiness. However, from the view of subjective experience there is a difference in the understanding or view of emptiness between sutra and tantra.

- H.H. The Dalai Lama (*Dzogchen*, 2000)

His Holiness teaches that the contemplative view and practice of meditation on the intrinsic emptiness of existence of appearing phenomena is essentially the same in the first six of the nine *Nyingma* vehicles, that is, the three sutra vehicles and the first three or outer tantric vehicles. These are the vehicles that are founded upon the Middle Way of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti, as we have seen. Likewise, in the final three tantric vehicles—the inner tantras of *Nyingma* including *Dzogchen* and its *Ati Yoga* and the *Anuttara yoga/ Highest Yoga Tantra (Essence Mahamudra)* of the new translation tantra schools—the levels of subtlety or depth regarding emptiness as the intentional object of meditation are again the same. This is the view of “objective emptiness,” the objective clear light (“objective luminosity”), “the emptiness which is the *object* of a wisdom consciousness.” Here, emptiness is viewed as a negation of phenomenal existence, and

therefore of an ontologically independent perceiving self. Here, emptiness is a “non-affirming negative phenomenon,” and is not replaced with anything positive, affirming, more inclusive or transcendent.

However, from the view of “subjective emptiness” (*nay lug*), the subjective experience of clear light mind (“subjective luminosity”) which is the more subtle wisdom consciousness of primordial Basic Mind Itself, there is a considerable difference in view between these highest tantras—*Dzogchen* and *Essence Mahamudra* on the one hand—and the less subtle tantra and sutra vehicles on the other. As we will see, *Mahashunyata*, the Buddha’s Great Emptiness is not *ultimately* a non-affirming negative. In the highest or subtlest view, the negated phenomena appearing to a self as relative-conventional reality is replaced by the *affirming* luminosity of the clear light (*’od gsallösel/özer/ prabhasvara*), the selfless, egoless positive pure bright clarity of the emptiness of form. “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form” (from Buddha’s Heart Sutra). Indeed, from the very beginning, there is no enduring *permanent* reality or self to negate! As we have seen, there are only these perceptually and conceptually designated relative- conventional truths of arising phenomenal appearance.

So there emerges a subtle, outshining luminosity as the Great Emptiness manifests itself from the primordial purity (*kadag*) of the Base or Ground (*gzhi*) as mere appearance of arising physical and mental forms—apparent, relative-conventionally perceived and imputed spacetime phenomenal reality. This brightness or radiance is then, the ultimate nature of Reality Itself (*cho nyid*), the clearlight Nature of Mind (*sems nyid*). But we are cautioned throughout the teaching that this essential Nature of Mind is not an ego-self, nor is it a “Higher Self,” eternal soul or theistic creator God. Nor is this luminous continuity of Basic Mind Essence some separate *thing*—something “other.” Such relative-conventional dualism—attachment to appearing phenomena, attachment to our beliefs about mind-created God or gods, and attachment to our experiencing separate egoic self-sense—belies the Ultimate or Absolute Truth of the prior unity of the Two Truths that is singular Basic Mind Nature. So the two truths are in actuality this one great truth (*paramartha satya*)—our Basis or Supreme Source—ultimate mode of everything that appears, realized, step-by-step through the confusion of the spiritual path.

Yet, paradoxically, this Absolute Truth, the ultimate Great Emptiness, is not itself an independently existing Absolute Truth. According to His Holiness, it too is subject to the prior causes and conditions of previous universes and *kalpas*, that is, it too is subject to the natural law of dependent arising (*pratitya samutpada*). This is, from the view of conceptual, relative truth, the ultimate paradox of the “emptiness of emptiness.” However, from the non-dual view of Absolute Truth there is no dilemma, no problem, no conceptual thinking whatsoever.

Do you understand the two minds: the mind which includes everything, and the mind that is related to something?

- Suzuki Roshi

Hence, there is a profound difference between the direct and immediate *actuality* of the transcendent wisdom of natural emptiness (essential *rigpa*), and indirect, mind-made perceptual-conceptual emptiness. So here, in the non-dual view of subjective emptiness of the deepest or highest tantras of both the old and the new tantra schools, the development stage Middle Way of the *Madhyamikas* of the *Svatantrika* and *Prasangika* Schools develops or yields to the deeper, subtler or more direct understanding that dialectically transcends, yet pervades and includes it. Here, in highest stage innermost secret *Ati yoga*, and Essence Mahamudra, emptiness meditation is an “affirming negative” in which the *actuality*—not an indirect concept and not a direct experience (*nyam*)—of clear light mind appears directly to the yogin/yogini, yet is “known to be empty of inherent existence.” This then, is the essential difference between the *Madhyamaka* of sutra and lower tantra *vis-à-vis* the highest non-dual tantras with regard to the view of emptiness. . .

**Relationship: Big Mind, Small Mind, and the Bridge.** Can this direct, greater esoteric or non-dual (*advaya*, *gnyis med*, “not one, not two”) teaching of the innermost secret, highest tantras be reduced to the understanding of the less direct, lesser esoteric or even exoteric view and practice of the less subtle teaching of sutra or lower tantra, as Evans-Wentz, Jung and many other non-practitioner scholars have done? No. Throughout Buddhism, and indeed throughout our great Perennial Wisdom Tradition, the exoteric outer and lesser esoteric inner view cannot accomplish the greater esoteric, innermost or non-dual realization, despite protests of the pathologically independent, facile egalitarian, antiheirarchial postmodern ego-I. *Under sway of the ignorance (avidya) of this separate egoic self-sense we become the fearful, hopeful advocates of the developmental limits of our present lifestage with its uncomfortable “comfort zones,” arguing and defending the painful result.*

As we have seen, cross-cultural psychospiritual development (spiritual evolution), our relative-conventional growth through culturally universal sequential lifestages and mindstates of the body-mind-spirit (gross, subtle, causal and non-dual) continuum of consciousness, is invariant and state-specific. Lifestages and their accompanying mindstates presuppose earlier, less subtle emotional, phenomenological stages or levels of consciousness development (Appendix A). Although stages overlap, and unfinished psychoemotional business must be revisited and interpretively unpacked, lifestages cannot be skipped. While the wisdom understanding of the subtler, deeper or “higher” lifestages subsumes, includes and transcends the earlier, less subtle lifestages, the understanding of the latter cannot grasp, accomplish or realize the former. Of course there are surface differences—relative-conventional perception, concept and belief—in the structural constitution of developmental lifestages across sociocultural space and time. But the deeper, subtler mental-emotional-spiritual structures are the same. And the surface understanding cannot comprehend the depth.

For example, in the East/West stage model of our cognitive continuum of psychospiritual development, culturally conditioned relative-conventional symbols (language) emerge before concepts, which emerge before rules and morality, which necessarily precede exoteric (outer) religious belief, and then esoteric (inner), and finally greater esoteric (non-dual or innermost/ secret) subtle spiritual mindstates and lifestages

(Appendix A). The surface conceptual and belief systems and deity icons differ within the numinous Depth (*Bathos*), primordial womb that is their singular matrix and essential ontological structure, the very essence and nature of mind.

Just so, this non-dual perfectly subjective, luminous clear light Nature of Mind (*purusha/cittata/sem nyid*), Suzuki Roshi's "Big Mind," the ultimate or "definitive meaning" of our Supreme Source subsumes pervades and embraces, yet transcends all of the dualities of conditional existence, the relative-conventional limits of the "provisional meaning" of physical and mental experience that is the dependently arisen subjective content and objective production of dualistic "small mind" (*prakriti/citta/sem*). Again, conceptual small mind cannot grasp or realize Tao, the Great Emptiness that is Big Mind, although paradoxically, the "pure presence" of it is "always, already" present at the spiritual heart of each individual being. And it is the confusion of the spiritual path that is the bridge to the resolution of this paradox, and ultimately, the realization of this great truth. "Just as the steps of a staircase, you should train step-by-step. . . steadily to the end" (Shakyamuni, the Buddha).

His Holiness teaches that *dependent arising* or *dependent origination* (*pratitya samutpada*) of conventional reality is the "natural law" that all arising phenomena are "dependent upon their causes in connection with their particular conditions." Without this natural, uncreated interrelationship—this contextual, interdependent and coincident aggregation of causes and conditions—such appearing physical and mental phenomena could not, logically or empirically, arise and exist in any way at all.

If we can understand that all perception and all seeing is the great truth of dependent arising, then we can understand emptiness . . . the true Nature of Reality. Why? Because dependent arising *is* Reality Itself. . . Emptiness and compassion must be unified. . . So develop both compassion and an understanding of emptiness.

- Adzom Rinpoche (*Upaya Zen Center Retreat, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2002*)

In the *Prasannapada*, Chandrakirti's great commentary on Nagarjuna's *Exposition of the Middle Way*, we learn of this natural, unseparate interrelationship of emptiness and dependent origination, and the Buddha's *Four Noble Truths*. Chandrakirti reasons that, if we will first postulate the interrelated prior unity of emptiness and its arising interdependent phenomenal appearances ("form is emptiness, emptiness is form"), we can then postulate the causal connection, the cause and effect relationship, between the first two noble truths—the Truth of Suffering and the Truth of the Cause or Origin of Suffering. This causal connection is the natural law of karma—thought, intention, action and effect (positive and negative imprints). Karma is an example, in behavioral terms (conduct or ethics), of the general scientific law of causality that governs the realm of relative-conventional spacetime reality. Thus, from ignorance (*avidya*) arises concept mind (*manovijnana*), the egoic negative afflictive emotions—fear, anger, greed and pride—and attachment to the self (*klesha-mind/ klistamanovijnana*) that results in the mental and

emotional imbalances that produce the destructive behavior that causes suffering. The positive emotions of tantric Buddhism's Four Boundless States (The Four Immeasurables), our Perennial Wisdom's Great Love—kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity—result in mental and emotional balance that produces the behavior that causes happiness. It's so very natural and logical, so lawful. We reap what we sow. What we give is what we get. What goes around, comes around. "What you are is what you have been. What you will be is what you do now" (Shakyamuni, the Buddha).

Thus, according to Chandrakirti, from an understanding of these First and Second Noble Truths, we may consider that there may be a possible way to the final cessation of suffering—its cause or origin—a path or bridge to freedom from this ignorance and imbalance (*avidya/marigpalajnana*) that is the root cause of suffering. Thus follows the Third Noble Truth, the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering. And if this cessation is possible—and by the demonstration of the lives of all the buddhas and *mahasiddhas* of our Great Perennial Wisdom Tradition, it clearly *is* possible—we can then postulate the Fourth Noble Truth, the Eightfold Path that is the precise, objective, scientific mind training program that transforms habitual negative mental, emotional and attentional imbalances into our natural inherent transcendent wisdom, the *Prajnaparamita*, Great Mother of all the buddhas. This is the great truth that realizes and actualizes our primordial source or ground state, and beyond, to the ultimate perfection of buddhahood, perfectly awakened state and activity of being in form that is, paradoxically, always present within each one of us from the very beginning. "The child knows its mother."

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
- T.S. Eliot (*Four Quartets*)

How then, does an ordinary being become a buddha? What did the Buddha have? He had the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path that leads, step-by-step, to the final cessation of suffering (*nirvana*). What do we have? We have our Refuge in the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) that are the Three Roots (Guru, Deva, Dakini) and the Three Buddha Bodies (the three *kayas*). That is, we have—here and now—our *Buddha Nature*, mirrored by the spiritual mentor or Vajra Master; then we have the great teaching of the *Buddhadharma* and the intervention of mantra and the deities; and we have the *Sangha*, our spiritual community that also includes our spiritual lineage and all the enlightened ones—the *vidyadhara/rigzin* of the three times—past, present and future. Thus, we have always this Relationship, and the bridge that is the path of all the buddhas continuously revealing the prior and ever present unity of these precious Three Jewels.

So we take Refuge in the Three Jewels, the Three Roots, and the Trikaya of the Base, and begin to develop the great intention to the compassionate heartmind that is *bodhicitta*, for the sake of all beings. In Tibetan Buddhism we accomplish this through *ngöndro*, the

foundational practices that are the prelude to the *Dzogchen* or to the *Essence Mahamudra* transmission. Then, the point of practice of the *Mahayana* path is recognition, then realization of this prior ultimate unity of emptiness and compassion, and thereby the gradual integration of that into our lifeworld of relative-conventional thought, intention and action. This is the integration of View and Conduct, integration of Ultimate Truth with Relative Truth, integration of the Ground with the Fruit or Result, integration of *nirvana* and *samsara*—step-by-step, even though to the fearless warrior-yogi of “uncontrived wisdom conduct” such an integration has never left the prior unity of the perfect sphere of *Dharmakaya*. Herein arises the most unusual paradox of the most subtle paths of *Dzogchen*, and of Highest Yoga Tantra. . .

**The Paradox of the Path: Integrating View and Conduct.** So gradually, through the practice of the path, the veils of ignorance (*maya*) to the great truth are lifted and the understanding of the unity of emptiness and compassion is increased. Then, wonder of wonders, peaceful instant of emptiness equanimity, mindful non-conceptual recognition that is *rigpa*, “pure presence” of uncreated ineffable Basic Mind Essence. Here, the prior unity of method (*upaya/function*) and wisdom (*prajna/structure*), of all development and completion lifestages (*Mahayoga, Anuyoga* and *Atiyoga*), mindstates, *yanas* and wisdoms are, just for this interior moment *now (turiya)*, nakedly seen and known (penetrating insight) as *Dharmakaya*, utterly free of fear and hope, free of the duality of all emotional affliction and conceptual elaboration. “Who are you in the space between two thoughts?” In this non-dual “state of presence” ego-attachment or clinging, fear and anger “self liberate” at the very instant of their arising. Like a bird in the vast empty sky, thought and action leave “no trace.” Thoughts and appearances rise up from the great ocean of luminous clarity, then return again to this source without any change in essence. When one realizes that the actual nature of thinking and emotion is luminous clarity, there is no need to avoid thoughts, concepts and emotions. There is no need to believe that which we think, nor to defend that which we believe. “The Nature of Mind is Buddha from the beginning.” This is the view (*sho shin*) and fruition of Ultimate Truth. But it’s all just very ordinary—“nothing special” (*wu shin*). It appears special and dramatic only when viewed egoically, from the outer exoteric condition of the prideful, egoic, self-reified truths of relative-conventional reality.

So it is the ascending development stage of the path—devotion to the master, ordinary, repetitive everyday compassionate living, and the surrender or “letting go” that is renunciate practice—that transforms such extraordinary, special but temporary *samadhi* “states” into the permanent lifeworld “altered traits” of the meditative stabilization of completion stage realization, and compassionate lifeworld actualization. Then finally, in due course and by grace, there manifests the later *bhumis*, and the perfection of Buddhahood. “Descend with the view while ascending with the conduct. It is most essential to practice these two as a unity” (Padmasambhava).

We must then, engage the “paradox of the path” that is the paradox of seeking—the effortful foundational practices of the Buddha’s teaching—while standing firmly in effortless view and conduct of the highest non-dual tantras. This is the Buddha’s great

teaching in “two ways at once.” Thus, through skillful effort (*upaya*), while “letting it be as it is” —in due course and by grace of the master— we exhaust the seeking strategies of the Great Search and awaken to our already present perfect happiness, the buddha nature within each sentient form.

Here, our question posed above, the apparent contradiction between the two truths of the renunciate ascending view and conduct of the *Sutrayana* Theravadins, and the descending view and compassionate conduct of the *Mahayana* and *Tantrayana bodhisattva* ideal is resolved in non-dual clarity, the prior perfection of this primordial “state of presence,” the three *buddhakaya* dimensions resolved and unified in pure presence of the “essential *rigpa*” of *Dharmakaya* (*Svabhavakakaya*).

This great non-dual truth of the descent and ascent of Spirit through form is told again and again throughout the subtlest “innermost secret” teachings of our perennial Great Tradition. This is “the light of the Tao that is beyond heaven and earth,” the very “Gnosis of Light that lighteth every one that cometh into the world.” This is *Kham Brahm*—“All is *Brahman*”—“The Bright” of the old *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, and *Vedanta*. In Sutra this view is *Uma*, Ultimate Truth, the final third truth of T’eiin T’ai’s non-dual “Middle Way Buddha Nature” (Chih-i), beyond the duality of permanent, eternal existence, and nihilistic non-existence. In *Dzogchen* this practice is “swooping down from above (with the ideal of the view) while climbing up from below (through the struggle of the conduct).” Padmasambhava advises, “Keep the view as high as the sky, and your deeds as fine as barley flower.” Yet here, Guru Rinpoche cautions us not to “lose the view in the conduct,” and not to lose “the conduct in the view.” We must not lose the View of Absolute Truth—The Great Emptiness—in the dualistic ignorance of the hope and fear of conceptual relative-conventional truths and the ethical conundrums of right and wrong conduct. Just so, we must not lose the relative truths of ethical conduct—valuation, deciding on kindness while rejecting unkindness—for a political, idealized, but unrealized view of the Great Perfection of non-dual Ultimate Truth.

If you lose the view in the conduct, you will never have the opportunity to be free. If you lose the conduct in the view, then you ignore the difference between good and evil . . . you stray into black diffusion.

- Tulku Urgyen, *At It Is*, 2000)

So we just continue the compassionate ethical conduct of our relative-conventional spiritual practice, in the midst of the continuous error (*shushaku jushaku*) of hope and fear, of accepting and rejecting, while making a constant mindful effort to *keep the View* that is utterly free of this dualistic bias—perfectly free of the three emotional poisons of ignorance, desire and anger—that mindless continuous cycle of “black diffusion” of one without a greater view. This is the great Middle Way view that is the precursor to the non-dual realization of a buddha, the “pure view” that lives, sleepwaiting at the heart of each one of us as we tread our chosen path.

What a marvelous paradox! *In order to integrate the two truths of View and Conduct we*

must distinguish the duality of their relative difference—so that we don't lose one in the other—while yet abiding in the continuous non-dual awareness of their prior essential unity. Step-by-step, by the grace of the spiritual master, of course.

This then, is the perfect practice of the integration of view and conduct, wisdom and merit, the prior unity of the Two Truths—ultimate and relative—that is both origin and aim of the activity or behavior (ethics) of the ascending and the descending aspects of refuge in the Three Jewels of the Buddhist Path, and indeed, of all the “greater esoteric” or non-dual innermost secret spiritual paths of our entire great Perennial Wisdom Tradition. This unity is and has always been, “already accomplished,” nothing special, ever present and never absent from our inherent happiness, right here and now, radiating its light to all beings in the very midst of the dark night of this confusion of our chosen lifeworld path. Wondrous paradox indeed!

**The Big Picture and the Middle Way.** According to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the innate clear light nature of mind, infinite, ineffable singularity of unmanifest luminosity of the primordial Ground or Base (*gzhi 'i 'od gsal*)—Buddha Nature—may be viewed from two levels of subtlety of understanding, sutra and tantra. *Sutrayana* understanding is, as we have seen, the “objective clear light.” *Tantrayana*, especially Anuttara Yogatantra (Highest Yoga Tantra) and *Dzogchen* understanding is, according to His Holiness, the subjective *experience* of clear light (*nay lug*) that is the non-dual primordial awareness of the essential clarity of Mind Nature (*sem nyid*), or Basic Clearlight Mind. This naked awareness (*rigpa jenpa*) of “fundamental innate clear light mind” is the essential, “ultimate root of consciousness,” the Ultimate Truth and definitive meaning of Reality Itself. This luminous “affirming negative” of clear light mind is the basis and essential or ultimate way of abiding for the meditator on emptiness. Here we have the ultimate solution to that *really* “hard problem” of the essential nature of consciousness itself, the realization and actualization of the ultimate Nature of Mind, Happiness Itself.

As we have seen, in *actuality* this primordial Transcendent Wisdom dialectically subsumes and transcends not only the objective understanding of the less subtle teaching on emptiness, but even its direct subjective yogic experience, for such wisdom is utterly non-dual (“not two, not one,” “two in one,” *neti, neti*/not this, not that). This resplendent clear light awareness is, for the yogin/yogini, “essential *rigpa*” (*paravidya*)—prior unity of appearance and emptiness, of clarity/luminosity and emptiness, of bliss and emptiness, of awareness and emptiness (the four *wangs* or empowerments) of development, completion and perfection lifestages of the path—just for the singularity of this timeless eternal moment now, moment to moment (“brief moments many times”) in perfect unbroken symmetry of all-embracing primordial awareness continuum of all that is. *Rigpa* then, is not a concept (thought) or an experience (*nyam*), but the *apriori*, bright naked *presence* of the transcendent Primordial Awareness Wisdom (*yeshe/jnana*), *Prajnaparamita*—Divine Wisdom Mother of all the buddhas—prior to mind-created thought, explanation, emotion and experience.

So the transcendent unity of clearlight mind has its objective and subjective aspects. The former is the “object emptiness” (*lhundrub*/presence) that is always already united

with the latter, the subjective aspect of clear light (*kadag/purity*), *Dharmakaya* (*chö ku*), the Ultimate Reality (*chö nyid*). This Reality is the Absolute Truth (*don dam denpa, paramartha*) that is the “all empty” non-dual Ground or Emanation Base (*gzhi*), our Great Wisdom Mother (*Yeshe*), primordial womb of all the descending subtle and gross appearing phenomena of the relative truths of *Sambhogakaya* and *Nirmanakaya*. “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” There is no emptiness other than form. There is no form that is not an emptiness.

Yet emptiness and form are not separate “things,” as we have seen. They are utterly interdependent, a prior perfectly subjective unity. “This is the Buddha’s great truth of dependent arising—the final view that is free of the duality of the extremes of absolute permanent existence, or the nihilism of non-existence. . .” (Adzom Rinpoche, 2002). *The future is entirely dependent upon what is occurring now. “What you are is what you have been. What you will be is what you do now”* (Shakyamuni, the Buddha). This great truth is the basis of our Perennial Wisdom’s natural law of cause and effect—karma—our behavior and conduct, the way we must live to be happy in this mad, mad world. Phenomena appear dualistically, as pure or impure, but their *energy essence* and basis or source—their actual nature—is always radiant non-dual emptiness, ever free of all the perceptual imputation, conceptual designation, and the emotional hope and fear of “small mind.” “There is nothing other than this.” This then, is the radically postcritical, postmetaphysical great truth of *Uma*, the Middle Way—beyond dualistic conceptual judgment, beyond crazy or sane, beyond good and evil, utterly “gone beyond” (*paragate*) all concept, belief, deity, icon and archetype.

Of course, we must evaluate—polarize/dualize—to live in the realm of empirical, relative-conventional spacetime reality. As we have seen, ethical conduct requires that we discriminate between good and evil, between unifying pure view, and separative false views, between kind intention and action, and harmful destructive thought and action. Yet, there is this great primordial transcendent View—the big picture “as high as the sky”—abiding in perfection of the non-dual Middle, always in the timeless fourth time (*turiya*), deep in the heart of this very moment Now, at the spiritual heart of every being. .

**The Triune Nature.** In the classical tantric metaphor, this perfectly subjective sourceground or base (*gzhi*) is like the infinite expanse of cloudless sky. *Rigpa* is like the sun, the sky’s vast capacity for the perfect clarity of awareness. The descending light/energy/motion of this infinite awareness continuum is like the sun’s rays (*’od gsal*), transcendent Primordial Awareness Wisdom (*yeshe, jnana, gnosis*) penetrating and illuminating the dark clouds of ignorance (*avidya/marigpa*) that obscure the actual nature of Mind. These three manifest as the five rays or five colors of the great mandala of the five *Buddha* families, dependently arisen phenomena emerging as the five aggregates or *skandas* of relative-conventional, empirical spacetime reality. These three—sky, sun and rays—are respectively, *Dharmakaya*, *Sambhogakaya* and *Nirmanakaya*; the Three Vajras of Body, Voice, and Mind; *Om, Âh, Hum*. These three buddha bodies are the inseparable, unborn *Trikaya of the Base*, Absolute *Bodhicitta, Svabhavakakaya*—The Fourth Body—prior unity of the Vast Expanse of this infinite consciousness continuum that is primordial Mind

Nature Itself (*sem nyid*).

This unified Trikaya of the Base is the perfectly subjective deep background continuum that is unobstructed *Pure Alaya (amala-vijnana)*, the ninth consciousness revealed in the highest tantras. Its luminous presence is the buddha nature heartseed of all the *tathagatas*, all the buddhas of the three times—past, present and future—transcending yet pervading our waking, dreaming and deep sleep states through this timeless moment now, primordial abode of the fourth time (*turiya*). “The three times are one. . . Now is the time to enter into it” (Garab Dorje).

Therefore, from the view of relative-conventional truth, these three *kayas* or bodies are the three aspects of the great Perennial Wisdom Truth of our unseparate participation and growth through *exoteric* (course/outer/waking state), *esoteric* (subtle/inner/dream state), and ultimately, the non-dual *greater esoteric* (very subtle/innermost secret/deep sleep state) developmental lifestages—all the way to the end of it—Buddhahood. (Appendix A: *The Seven Stages of Life and the Dimensions of Consciousness: A Perennial Wisdom Topology of Spirit*)

However, from the view of absolute or ultimate truth, the view of a buddha, all of this is merely the playful display of the prior infinite unity of *Dharmakaya*, utterly “gone beyond” sentient perception, concept, belief, archetype and all negative afflicted emotion. The stages of the path and the Transcendent Wisdom revealed and grounded therein is perfectly expressed in Sutra in the great *Prajnaparamita Mantra: Om, Gate, Gate, Paragate, Parasamgate, Bodhi Svaha* (from the *Heart Sutra*), and in Tantra in the Great Mantra of Avalokiteshvara: *Om Mani Padme Hum (Hrih)*. Perhaps the most profound of Tibetan Buddhist mantras for the practitioner on the path is the Vajra Guru Mantra: *Om Ah Hum Bendzra Guru Pema Siddhi Hum*. It is said that the twelve syllables of this mantra bestow the complete blessing of the Buddha’s twelve kinds of teaching that entirely purifies the negative emotional obstructions of the twelve links of dependent arising on the Wheel of Becoming! It furthers one to practice these mantras. . .

Such an Orphic, participatory epistemology and ontology has been called, in the gloss of the emerging noetic (mind-spirit) New Reformation view, the “wholeness principle”—*telos, eros*, the movement that connects (growth)—attitudinal view, meditation and action or conduct. This is the path that is the intertheoretical, meditative-contemplative and practical antidote to *thanatos*, the destructive “separative principle” embodied as the three emotional poisons: *avidya*/ignorance that is desire/ attachment and anger/aggression. Within the unbroken wholeness of the ultimate Nature of Mind arises the twelve links of mind-generated positive and negative thought and emotion. Ignorance of the essential goodness of this Ground is *thanatos*—evil—the incessant “black diffusion” that manifests as negative materialist idiom and ideology of interobjective (social) and intersubjective (cultural) global massmind.

Thus all limbs of the Buddha’s teaching have this one purpose—to bring us to the non-dual Transcendent Wisdom. It participates in and pervades all views and paths for one who is capable of accessing it. . . All things flow from

emptiness, and return again to emptiness, like the sun and its rays. This is dependent arising. . . the dynamic display of the mind. This is the ultimate nature of arising phenomena, the Nature of Reality Itself.

- Adzom Rinpoche (2002)

**The Threefold Space.** According to recent *Dzogchen* master Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, the two innermost principles of *Dzogchen* are Space (*ying/dhatu*) and Awareness (*rigpa/vidya*). This Basic Space is pregnant luminous emptiness, the unity of emptiness and clear luminosity. In the *Dzogchen* teaching it is often seen as a threefold unity. Outer *ying* is like pure vast empty sky, the Great Emptiness (*Mahashunyata*) in whom arises all phenomena. This is *Akashadhatu*. Inner *ying* is the emptiness of Mind Essence, the very Nature of Mind (*citatta/sem nyid*). This is *Vajradhatu*. Innermost *ying* is *rigpa*, luminous clarity of non-dual recognition, bright knowing awareness of the prior primordial unity of these three. This is *Jnanadhatu*. In *Dzogchen*, this innermost realization of space, of the infinite “Vast Expanse” is *klong (long)*, beyond all judgment and bias, beyond even the subtlest subject-object duality, beyond subjective and objective emptiness, beyond ground and path luminosity.

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; *Rainbow Painting*, 1995)

Here is neither samsara nor nirvana, neither self nor other, neither buddhas nor sentient beings. This state is known as primordial purity because it is not stained or obscured by any hint of confusion or dualistic thought; it is the original, pure nature of all existence . . .

- Francesca Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 2001

“The dharmakaya arises unnecessarily out of infinite space” (Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche). And the great beauty of it—“It is already accomplished,” here, now, for everyone. Constant human awareness of this great truth precedes the compassionate conduct that lifts the suffering of beings and generates great happiness in the giver.

**No Problem.** We may now review the three essential *yanas* of the Buddhist path—sutra, tantra and *Dzogchen*. According to the Third Dodrupchen, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the higher or Inner Tantras of both *Anuttarayoga tantra* or Highest Yoga Tantra (father, mother and non-dual tantras), and of *Ati Dzogchen (semde, longde, mengagde/ upadesha* teaching series) are essentially non-dual tantras, while the less subtle, less direct outer tantras and sutras of the *Triyana* remain the more fundamental or foundational vehicles of the Buddha’s transmission to us. And all these vehicles of the path have the

same goal—*Prajnaparamita*—the great primordial Transcendent Wisdom (*Jnana/Yeshe*), the wisdom of the buddhas. His Holiness reminds us here, that without this foundation of the path, the wisdom temple cannot be built. Thus, for Tibetan Buddhism, the preliminaries or foundational practices (*ngöndro*) are actually the most profound. Indeed, they contain and introduce the very highest non-dual teaching of both sutra and tantra. They continue to be fundamental through development, completion and perfection stages of all the *Vajrayana* paths.

The Tibetan *Vajrayana* or *Mantrayana* then, contains both *Sutrayana* and *Tantrayana* teaching vehicles: the *renunciation* practices of the sutras, the *transformation* practices of Outer and Inner Tantras and of non-dual highest *Essence Mahamudra*, and the non-dual, “spontaneously self-perfected” (*lhundrub*) state of *Ati Dzogchen*. The profound paradox of the *Dzogchen* view is that there is no afflicted consciousness or emotion that must be renounced, purified or transformed! Indeed, there is no actual reality at all to negate, merely appearances. The Nature of Reality, its very heart-essence, is “perfect from the very beginning,” is “Buddha from the very beginning.” This prior, inseparable unity of emptiness, luminosity and awareness is blissful primordially pure presence of androgenous Samantabhadra (Vajradhara, Dorje Chang), our Supreme Source, always present throughout the bodymind, ascending and descending upon the breath of mindfulness, indestructible *thigle* essence deep at the heart. This is the essence of Buddha’s third turning of the wheel of the dharma. Again we understand, this, our bright innermost presence (*rigpa/vidya*) is our continuous participation in the actual Nature of Mind, the ultimate nature of Reality Itself (*chö nyid*), just as it is (*thamel gyi shepa*), utterly transcending any thought, concept or even experience of it. *Tat tvam asi*. We are unseparate from *That*.

When we forget ourselves we are actually the true activity of the big existence, or reality itself. When we realize this fact, there is no problem whatsoever in this world. The purpose of our practice is to be aware of this fact. . . It may be too perfect for us, just now, because we are so much attached to our own feeling, to our individual existence. . . When you can sit with your whole body and mind, and with the oneness of your mind and body under the control of the universal mind, you can easily attain this kind of right understanding. . . When we reach this understanding we find the true meaning of our life. . . How very glad the water must be to come back to the original river!

- Suzuki Roshi, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, 1970

In this way then, through a non-dual understanding, the two seemingly contradictory theses of the views on emptiness in Sutra and Tantra—objective and subjective, ascending and descending—are dialectically transcended, yet included and embraced in the higher or deeper synthesis of the supreme view and practice of the subtlest highest tantras, without mistakenly reducing the great non-dual teaching to explanatory experiences and expressions of a profound, yet less subtle understanding. “No problem whatsoever.”

Ultimately then, the emptiness of *Madhyamaka* is the emptiness of *Dzogchen* and of highest *Essence Mahamudra*, although the relative-conventional view and practice differs slightly. And the result or fruition of all three is identical—Buddhahood. Again, this is the Buddha’s perfect teaching in “two ways at once,” the prior “natural unity of one identity with two aspects.” One ground, two truths, three bodies are a prior unity that is *apriori* Ultimate Truth of our perfect Sourceground, already embodied deep within us. This is the Supreme Source of arising illusion and confusion of relative-conventional reality of the spiritual path, all the way to its ultimate fruition. A most amazing paradox!

Each and every one of us has the potential to realize fruition. It is you yourself, who make the decision . . . Open the door . . . follow the path right to the end.

- H.H. The Dalai Lama

### **Ground, Path, Fruit**

The Fruit is no different at the pinnacle of enlightenment than it is at the Base.

- Adzom Paylo Rinpoche

**Integrating the Ground and the Fruit Through the Path.** Therefore, in the *Dzogchen* View the Fruition—enlightenment or Buddhahood—is always already present in the very nature of our essential Base or Ground (Emptiness/Buddha Nature), but it is not yet realized and actualized through the Body, Voice and Mind of this nature. The essence of enlightenment—the very heartseed of Buddha Nature “is a continuity that extends throughout our journey along the stages of ground, path and fruition” (Kenchen Thrangu Rinpoche). The precious *samaya* or covenant between Vajra Master and student facilitates the *Dzogchen* development (creation) and completion stages of the path. This is absolutely necessary to integrate and accomplish the prior already perfect unity of ground and fruition in the confusion context of our everyday lifeworld. If this process is to bear the fruit of liberation, the student must continuously dedicate the merit and benefit of these profound practices, not to the self, but to the benefit and ultimate happiness of all beings, great and small, everywhere. What then, is the *Dzogchen* method of clarifying the confusion of the path? It is View, Meditation, and Conduct.

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 Main Point.** Dodrupchen teaches that “The main point is that the rigpa taught in the *Dzogchen* approach and the wisdom of clear light (*Anuttarayoga tantra*) are one and the same.” Twentieth Century *rime* (non-sectarian) master Tulku Urgyen agrees. Regarding the “three great views”:

The view of Mahamudra, Dzogchen and Madhyamaka is identical in essence. Although it is said, ‘the ground is Mahamudra, the path is the Middle Way, and the fruition is the Great Perfection,’ in the view itself there is no difference whatsoever. . . The awakened state of Mahamudra doesn’t differ from the awakened state of Dzogchen or Madhyamaka. Buddhahood is the final fruition of all these regardless of which of these paths you follow.

- Tulku Urgyen (*Rainbow Painting*, 1995)

Thus, the awakened state of presence—*rigpa*—does not differ in *Dzogchen*, or the *Essence Mahamudra* of Highest Yoga Tantra, or the highest *Madhyamaka of the Definitive Meaning*. However, His Holiness, the Dalai Lama cautions us not to confuse this highest, greater esoteric or innermost secret non-dual teaching with the lesser esoteric *Mahamudra* and *Madhyamaka* of sutra and lower tantra. This difference in subtlety is the essential difference between the “highest” teachings and the teachings of the “lower” tantras and sutras.

Dodrupchen’s “effulgent *rigpa*” of the clear light is the aspect of *rigpa* that is “experienced” when conceptual thoughts (*vikalpa*) of the less subtle mind states are present—“*rigpa* that arises from the ground, and is the appearance of the ground.” “Essential *rigpa*” is the indwelling, pure direct “experience” in the yogin/yogini—free of any conceptual elaboration—the experience of the non-dual ultimate “fundamental innate mind of clear light.” Moreover, this tantric clearlight mind is essentially the same as the *sutrayana* non-dual “transcendent wisdom” of the *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, beyond or prior to subject and object, self and other, and all the dualities of the conditional spacetime dimensions of the world of empirical relative-conventional truth.

So there is effulgent *rigpa* of the appearances of the Ground or Base, and essential *rigpa* of the actual Ground or Base. But Dodrupchen also identifies *rigpa* that is both, and *rigpa* that is neither. In the former there is *rigpa* of the conceptual appearances arising from the Base, effulgent *rigpa*, but here, in “*rigpa* attaining its full measure” the yogin/yogini has taken a “firm stance within the essence of the Base,” essential *rigpa*. Here then, we have both effulgent and essential qualities and experiences of *rigpa*. However, Dodrupchen’s fourth alternative is *rigpa* that is neither effulgent nor essential *rigpa*. This is the “*rigpa* of all-embracing spontaneous presence (*lhundrub*), the dharmakaya wisdom of fruition” that is the “ultimate fruition. . . the ultimate state of freedom . . . exhaustion of

phenomena beyond the mind” (H.H. The Dalai Lama, 2000). . .

Longchen Rabjam (1308-1364) the great synthesizer of the *Dzogchen* transmission teaches:

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 (*melôn*), 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

So the atavistic self-arising wisdom consciousness (*rigpa*) is primordially pure, and in Longchenpa’s words, “empty and clear” — the unity of emptiness and the clarity that is luminosity. Again, it is the prior “natural unity of one identity with two aspects.” *Shunyata* literally means empty (*shunya*) awareness (*ta*). This Supreme Source or Primordial Base of the chaos of appearing energy forms is empty and aware — the unity of emptiness with its energy appearances arising upon the *prana* wind of awareness (*lungta*). Its *essence* is emptiness, *primordial purity/kadag* (*trekchö* practice): subjective “inner lucidity,” wisdom, *dharmakaya* ultimate truth. Its *nature* is awareness, *spontaneous presence* (*lhundrub*) of emptiness in every form (*tögal* practice): objective “outer lucidity,” *upaya*/means, compassion, *rupakaya*, relative truth. The non-dual unity of these two truths is *Dzogchen*, perfect sphere of The Great Perfection of wisdom realized through the practice of *Ati Yoga*, utterly liberated and free of the twofold ignorance — forgetting and thinking — grasping at a self and grasping at phenomenal reality. This grasping and attachment results from the impure view that is the reifying conceptual elaboration (*namtok*) of relative-conventional phenomena and states of experience of the ego-I of dualistic mind (*sem*) dwelling in the three times. The antidote, and beyond? “Without past, present, future; empty, awake mind.” As we have seen, this awake mind is the non-dual unelaborated spontaneity of the fourth time (*turiya*, the fifth state of *turiyatita*) that abides within this relative-conventional moment, exactly as it is now.

According to Tulku Ugyen, this luminous inner union of emptiness and form is the deity Vajrayogini (Yeshe Tsogyal/Vajra Varahi). “Knowing one, liberates all.” Through knowing our Buddha Nature we are ever free. Through the path, conventional esoteric *Sambhogakaya* deity unites exoteric conceptually contrived *Nirmanakaya* form with *Dharmakaya*, beyond all duality, radically uncontrived ultimate truth, our singular Ultimate Basis or Sourceground. Lama Mipham on the *Dzogchen* view of these Two Truths

of the Buddha, that final truth of the always present unity of absolute emptiness and relative form:

Within the essence, original wakefulness which is primordially pure, manifests the nature, a radiance which is spontaneously present.

- Mipham Rinpoche

**What to Do? Choosing Our Reality.** “It is only by training the mind that one reaches peace of mind” (H.H. The Dalai Lama). “The Meditation” of the path is the practice of training the mind in equanimity (*upeksha/shanti*), recognizing — “brief moments many times” — the “one taste” of this non-dual unity of Mind Essence, ever present *state of pure presence* that is the marvelous transcendent Primordial Awareness Wisdom, pointed out and mirrored (*semtri/darshan/denbo*) only by the Vajra Master. Gradually through such “meditative stabilization” we learn: “Without changing anything, let it be as it is.” “Make of yourselves a light,” the Buddha’s last words to his disciples. Then let it shine. This is the difference in view and conduct between the dualistic deluded and negative materialism (“black diffusion”) of the massmind programmed individual consciousness of *namshe* that transmigrates through the *bardo* of the six realms and twelve links (*nidana*) of the *Bhava chakra* — karmic wheel of the dependently arisen cycle of samsaric conditional existence — and our non-dual primordial wakefulness (*rangjung yeshe*). This beautiful original face is *Yeshe*, Vajrayogini, our unborn buddha nature that is the “single sphere of *Dharmakaya*.” Thus do we choose our destiny.

Remaining naturally (in the state of *rigpa*) is the meditation. The nature of mind is Buddha from the beginning. . . Realizing the purity essence of all things, to remain there without seeking is the meditation.

- Garab Dorje (*The Three Vajra Verses*)

Regarding the subject and object of meditation, this perfectly subjective transcendent wisdom consciousness — ineffable Supreme Source that is androgenous, primordial Adi Buddha Samantabhadra — Longchenpa reveals that this fundamental ground in whom all appearing phenomena arise is without beginning and without end, unborn and uncreated, ontologically prior to the relative-conventional causality of appearing spacetime reality. What never existed, cannot cease to exist. Therefore, arising objective phenomenal particulars and beings of the perfectly subjective Ground, who abide in an acausal spacetime transcendent relation of essential identity with this sourceground can have no creator for they are originally and primordially unseparate and ever embraced and pervaded by this Ground. Phenomena, beings and the egoic sense of self are, in actuality, a perfectly subjective unity, beyond belief, prior to all apparent, interdependent spacetime arising. The painful perennial duality of creator/creation, of self and other — our uncomfortable “confront zones” — is thereby transcended in its infinite non-dual Source, Ultimate Truth of Reality Itself (*chö nyid*). For Longchenpa

Original purity in its essence has never existed as anything; rather its nature,

like that of space, is primordially pure so that anything whatsoever can manifest. The origin of all samsara and nirvana is atemporal, with no beginning or end. . . The unique vast expanse . . . spontaneous presence . . . is not created by anyone. All things that emerge from it—all possible phenomena without exception—are one within the fundamental ground from which they emerge, since causality is negated . . . The ultimate heart essence, which transcends existence and non-existence . . . is truly beyond all conventional expression and description. . . From the standpoint of enlightenment, the heart essence from which everything arises, there is no duality . . . Buddhas, beings, and the universe of appearances and possibilities are evident, yet do not waver from the single nature of phenomena, just as it is. . . Leave everything as it is. . . Primordial buddhahood, the ground of fully evident enlightenment, unchanging, spontaneously present, the basic space of the vajra heart essence—the nature of mind is natural great perfection.

-Longchen Rabjam, *The Precious Treasury of the Way of Abiding* (Commentary), Padma Publishing edition, 1998

This same heart essence of innate clearlight mind, this “essential *rigpa*” that is the joyous blessing gift (*jin lab*) of the state of primordially pure presence of the compassionate buddha nature within us was earlier transmitted directly to us through the Buddha’s Second Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, revealed and elaborated, as we have seen, in the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* (*The Great Sutra of Transcendent Wisdom*), the heart essence of which is expressed in the Buddha’s sublime *Heart Sutra*. This transcendent unity of the Two Truths of *Madhyamaka*—the Perfection of Wisdom of sutra and tantra—and the non-dual View of the unity of the Ground, Path and Fruit of Highest Yoga Tantra and of *Dzogchen* are expressed by the Buddha thusly:

Form is no other than emptiness, emptiness is no other than form. . . The nature of mind is the unity of awareness and emptiness. . . The mind is devoid of mind, for the nature of mind is clear light. . . Leave everything as it is and rest your weary mind, all things are perfect exactly as they are . . . and all the *Tathagatas* will rejoice.

-Shakyamuni Buddha (from the *Prajnaparamita Corpus*)

Now, there is nothing left to do. So all that we do is selfless, authentic and kind. . .

### Who Is It?

In whom does this all arise?

-Adi Da Samraj

The primary *Dzogchen* tantra, *The Kunjed Gyalpo* (*The Supreme Source*), must be considered one of humankind’s great spiritual treasures. According to Chögyal Namkhai Norbu, this supreme non-dual teaching has been transmitted from master to disciple directly, heartmind to heartmind, for thousands of years. Its current tantric version dates

from the 8th century C.E., and is a fundamental tantra of the *Dzogchen semde* teaching series. This version of the great non-dual primordial teaching is derived from Buddhist sutra and tantra understanding of the Nature of Mind, yet its truth essence runs, like a golden thread, through the grand tapestry of humankind's great Wisdom Tradition. *Kunjed Gyalpo, The Wise and Glorious King* is Samantabhadra/ Samantabhadri in inseparable yabyum embrace— androgenous primordial Adi Buddha— state of pure presence, clarity and emptiness that is actually our original buddha nature, Supreme Source, Basis, primordial womb of everything. Samantabhadra, this *Dharmakaya* Buddha speaks to Vajrasattva, the *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*, (1999)

Thus do the sutras and the tantras of Buddha's teaching, the 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 infinite Mind Nature, luminous innate clear light mind that is always the unity of awareness and emptiness. Who is it, that I am? All the masters of the three times have told it. This infinite vast expanse (*longchen*) of the Primordial Awareness Wisdom continuum is who we actually are. *Tat tvam ami. That, I Am!* That (*Tat*) 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.