

## Nine Vehicles of Enlightenment According to the *Nyingma* Tradition

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

—Shakyamuni, the Buddha (*Lankaratara 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 masters also taught in this manner. In the First Turning of the Wheel of the *Dharma* (Deer Park transmission) 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: the *Hinayana* or *Theravada* (lesser vehicle, *Shojo zen*), the *Mayayana* (greater vehicle, *Daijo* and *Saijojo zen*), and the *Vajrayana* (diamond vehicle). Of these three vehicles, the *Nyingma* (old school of the *Vajrayana* or Tibetan Tantric tradition) further classifies Buddhist teachings (of the historical Buddha, the *Tripitaka*, and later *terma* and *Sambhogakaya* transmissions of the Buddha *dharma*) into nine vehicles. **The key point of all nine vehicles is the tacit or express teaching of luminous emptiness (*shunyata*). The essential nature of all phenomena is *shunyata*.** "There is a refinement of understanding that becomes progressively more subtle through the vehicles" (Tulku Urgyen), culminating in the non-dual teaching of the *Mahayana* (*Saijojo Zen* and the non-dual *Madhyamika* or *Uma*, the middle way), and *Vajrayana* (*Dzogchen* and *Mahamudra*). The dualistic *Hinayana* or Pali School survives today in Southeast Asia as the *Theravada*, teaching of the elders, and in *Shojo* and *Daijo Zen* of both the *Soto* and *Rinzai* schools. The non-dual *mujudo no taigen* of *Saijojo zen* is also taught in both Zen schools (Ch.III).

**The *Hinayana*:** The first Two Vehicles consist of (1) the *Shravakayana*, the Vehicle of the Listeners, or disciples, and (2) the Vehicle of the Solitary Buddhas, (*Pratyekayana*) the way of solitary meditation. The goal of the *Hinayana* is to become an *Arhat* (saint), one who has saved oneself from the passions of *samsara* through practice of the "three baskets" of the *Tripitaka* (Pali Canon): *Vinaya* (monastic life), *Sutra* study, and the metaphysics of the *Abhidharma*. It is through this practice, with *shamatha* meditation that the mind is finally brought to rest. *Hinayana* practice is not a "lesser vehicle" but is the foundation for all of the other vehicles (Nyoshul Khenpo 1995).

**The *Mahayana*:** The Third Vehicle, the Great or Causal Vehicle, the *Bodhisattoyana* (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 *samsara*. Thus it is known as the *Mahayana*, or greater vehicle to enlightenment. The goal of the path here is not individual salvation or Arathood, but the development of the *bodhisatt-*

*va* attitude or intention, compassion for the suffering of all sentient beings, and the aspiration to save all beings from suffering. The ultimate goal of the *Mahayana* is nothing less than Buddhahood.

The *Mahayana Sutras* (Vulture Peak Transmission) represent the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> turnings of the *Dharma* Wheel (perfection of wisdom and mind-only teachings). From this vehicle arose the *Madhyamika* (the Middle Way) and the *Yoga Cara* (mind-only) schools. Here the Buddha reveals that the intrinsic nature of all reality is *shunyata* (luminous emptiness). The view of the *Mahayana* is that the inherent nature of all beings is Buddha nature (*Tathagatagarbha*, Jap. *Bussho*). The great non-dual teaching of the *Mahayana* appears in slightly different forms as the *Madhyamika* of the Definitive Meaning, and in *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 *Hinayana* and the *Mahayana* collectively comprise the *Sutra* System.

**The Vajrayana (Mantrayana)**, the collective (outer/lower and inner/higher *tantras*) teachings of the *tantras* (*tantra* system or *mantra* system) were transmitted by Vajrasattva (*Sambhogakaya* aspect of the historical Buddha). The *vajra* (Sanskrit) or *dorje* (Tibetan) means diamond and symbolizes the adamantine, radiant, indestructible inherent nature of all beings.

**The Outer Tantras** comprise the 4th 5th and 6th Vehicles. The 4th Vehicle, *Kriya Tantra* is exoteric. *Charya Tantra* (*Yogachara* or *Chittamatra*/Mind Only, the 5th Vehicle), is exoteric. The 6th Vehicle, the *Yogatantra* practice is esoteric but still dualistic. The lower *tantras* were transmitted to those of lesser capacity, the higher *tantras* to those of greater capacity.

**The Inner Tantras** of the ancient *Nyingma* tradition comprise the three highest vehicles (vehicles 7, 8 and 9): *Mahayoga* (development stage), *Anuyoga* (completion stage), and *Atiyoga* (*Dzogchen*, perfection stage). More recent *Vajrayana* traditions (ninth and tenth centuries), *Sakya*, *Kagyü* 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 the non-dual *Essence Mahamudra*. The highest and most direct vehicle of the *Nyingma* tradition is *Atiyoga*, (*Dzogchen* or *Dzogpa chenpo*, [Skt. *Mahasandi*], the Great Perfection). The non-dual view of *Dzogchen* is nearly identical to the non-dual *Essence Mahamudra* teaching of the *Kagyü* school, the non-dual Supreme Vehicle of Zen (*Saijojo*), and the non-dual teaching of the *Great Madhyamika of the Definitive Meaning*. It is taught by Tulku Urgyn Rinpoche (1995) and other non-sectarian *rime* (*ris-med*) masters that this *Great Madhyamika* teaching is the ultimate view of the *Nirmanakaya*; the *Essence Mahamudra* is the ultimate non-dual view of the *Sambhogakaya*; and *Dzogchen* (*Ati yoga*) is the ultimate non-dual view of the *Dharmakaya*. Further, the Base (source, ground) is the

*Mahamudra*, the Path is the Great *Madhyamika* of the Middle Way, and *Dzogchen* is the Fruit or result (enlightenment and Buddhahood).

With the advent of the non-sectarian *rime* movement of the last century many *Kagyü*, *Sakya* and *Gelug* as well as *Nyingma* masters practice and teach *Ati Dzogchen*, the Great Perfection. And many *Dzogchen* masters practice the *Mahamudra* of the *Kagyü* school. In *Dzogchen*, *shamatha* (stillness) and *vipasyana* (insight) meditation are united. “Awake mind is the unity of *shamatha* and *vipasyana*.” In the *Mahayana*, the Supreme Vehicle of *Saijojo* Zen this same unity is practiced as *shikan-taza*, the *zazen* of the unity of stillness with non-dual insight (direct seeing/*kensho/satori*). Sectarian bias in the beginning or advanced practitioner of any of the great non-dual paths will quickly derail the practice. Yet, one must commit to a path and a master, or masters.

The 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 the Great Tradition of Humankind have agreed to transmit the secret nondual teaching of their various traditions to all of those willing to receive. Without this, the great teaching will die. **Indeed, the transmission of this supreme teaching from the living lineage holders of the entire Perennial Great Tradition is the fundamental process and result of the emerging global New Reformation in religion, science and culture.**

### A Brief History of the Non-Dual Dzogchen Teaching

“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 Cuckoo of the State of Presence* or *The Six Vajra Verses*) who brought them from Uddiyana to Tibet in the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century they were synthesized by **Long Chen Pa** (Longchen Rabjum 1308-1363) into a unified system, the *Seven Treasures* (*Dzodun*). In the eighteenth century **Jigme Ling Pa** (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 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 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 *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 the ancient *Dzogchen* teaching was transmitted to Garab Dorje by the historical Buddha Shakyamuni (b. 563 BCE), the twelfth of the twelve great *Dzogchen* masters, in his *sambhogakaya* form as Vajrasattva (Tulku Urgyen, 1995).

From an 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 historical 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 space- time 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 incarnation of 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 non-dual *Ati Dzogchen* teaching, by whatever name, has appeared in inhabited star systems throughout the *kosmos* for many *kalpas*, long before the appearance of our solar system, and will continue long after its death. Meanwhile, our purpose is to practice, realize and teach it here, now.

### **The Non-Dual 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 mani-

feels, 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 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* 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* series is based.
3. **The Fruit/Result: Continue in the state with confidence in liberation** (total realized integration of the Base 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 (p.113, 114) (Compare these with the *Four Statements of Zen*, p.141).

## **The Primary *Dzogchen* Tantras**

### **The Six Vajra Verses of Vairochana**

The *Three Essential Points* (*The Three Vajra Verses*) of the essence, nature and energy of the Base, and of the Path and Fruition of it is contained in Vairochana's early *Dzogchen* tantra, the *Six Vajra Verses*, or "Cuckoo of the State of Presence" (*Rig-pa'i khu-byug*) of the Radiant One that each individual is, primordial Being Itself, the luminous presence of intrinsic awareness (*rig pa*). The cuckoo is the sacred bird of the *Bonpo* founder Shenrab Miwo and is considered in the aboriginal *Bon* tradition as the king of birds, harbinger of spring and bearer of wisdom from the vast empty sky. *The Six Vajra Verses* of Vairo-

chana and all of the hundreds of *Dzogchen* tantras and texts are but commentaries on Garab Dorje's *Three Vajra Verses* or *The Three Essential Points* (cf. p.99).

### **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** by direct transmission (*semde*): Introduce the state of *rig pa* directly (*ngo-sprod*) by transmission from the 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 *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 or teaching." That is dualistic. Rather, choose the state of presence, moment to moment, now. Do not remain in dualistic, space-time located meditation on emptiness. Choose to be the vast empty space of the primordial non-dual state. Thus is the primordial state of presence stabilized through practice in the lifeworld. This is the "stabilizing" (*brtan pa*) phase of the *Dzogchen* teaching.

**The Fruit/Result**, (Integration, *mengagde*, or secret *upadesha, nyingthig*): Continue in the profound confidence (*gdeng*) of the wisdom of emptiness that is self-liberation. The Conduct: Liberation (*grol ba*) is prior to meditation. The state of presence or contemplation is already accomplished as thoughts arise and spontaneously selfliberate (*rang grol*). No effort. No seeking strategies. All thought and emotion, all arising is already primordially or universally liberated (*ta-drol*). Wise, compassionate conduct arises and continues from stable confidence (*gdeng*) in the luminous emptiness of the source, just as that very light descends and continues throughout the conduct in the lifeworld. Thus is the prior unity of the state of presence with the arising energy of inner and outer phenomenal experience realized, and expressed. This is the "integrating" or completion (*bsre ba*) phase of the *Dzogchen* teaching.

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 non-dual primordial state of *Bodhicitta*, the subtle seed (*thig le, bindu*) of Buddhahood that is the luminous empty source of all the manifestations of energy in the *kosmos*. However, according to Longchenpa and Lingpa, *mengagde* is the superior teaching for it is the least conceptual and most direct. Indeed it is heart-mind to heartmind transmission directly from the master, with no dependence on scripture. The secret *mengagde upadesha* then, is the supreme teaching of the *Ati 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 *Sámten Migdrön*, translated by Namkhai Norbu)

*H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche's Comments on Garab Dorje's Three Vajra Verses or The Three Statements* (cf. p.99; 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, the 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 non-dual!

### Love and The Great Perfection

In the moment of love, the nature of emptiness dawns nakedly.

—Tulku Urgyen

**The Great Perfection that is *Dzogchen* is the Great Love.** From this primordial awareness that is the non-dual Base or source arises the energy that manifests as the motion of conditional space-time mental and physical phenomenal reality. Here it briefly dwells. And into this, it will all return. From the moment to moment realization (*rig pa*) of the unity or identity of this arising phenomena with the luminous emptiness of its actual nature — the primordial unity of form and emptiness — spontaneously arises *The Conduct*: the selfless devotion and compassion that is the **activity** of love (*brtse-ba*). Right conduct is human action grounded in meditation and contemplation (*rig pa*) of the primordial source. The purpose or purity of intention is selfless service in the cause of the reduction and ultimate cessation of the suffering of all beings (relative *bodhicitta*, the awakened, compassionate heart, the urge to enlightenment). **Devotion to the master and to all enlightened beings, and wise (*prajna* and *ye-shes*), compassionate action in the service of all unenlightened beings (including ourselves) is love. "The practice of love is the sufficient practice"** (Tulku Urgyen); cf. p.64 ff.