



## **A Survey of the Paths of Tibetan Buddhism** **By His Holiness Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet**

### **Introduction**

In giving an overview of the Buddhadharma, as practised by the Tibetans, I generally point out that the Buddhism we practise is an integrated form comprising teachings of the low, Bodhisattva and Tantric vehicles, including such paths as the Great Seal. Because quite a number of people have already received initiations, teachings and so on, they might find it helpful to have an explanation of the complete framework.

We pass our lives very busily. Whether we behave well or not, time never waits for us, but goes on forever changing. In addition, our own lives continually move on, so if something goes wrong, we cannot repeat it. Life is always running out. Therefore, it is very important to examine our mental attitude. We also constantly need to examine ourselves in day to day life, which is very helpful to give ourselves guidelines. If we live each day with mindfulness and alertness, we can keep a check on our motivation and behaviour. We can improve and transform ourselves. Although I haven't changed or improved myself much, I have a continuing wish to do so. And in my own daily life, I find it very helpful to keep a check on my own motivation from morning until night.

During these teachings, what I will be describing is essentially a kind of instrument with which to improve yourself. Just as you might take your brain to a laboratory to examine your mental functions more deeply, so that you can reshape them in a more positive way. Trying to change yourself for the better is the point of view a Buddhist practitioner should adopt.

People of other religious traditions, who have an interest in Buddhism and who find such features of Buddhist practice as the meditative techniques for developing love and compassion attractive, could also benefit by incorporating them into their own tradition and practice.

In Buddhist writings many different systems of belief and tradition are explained. These are referred to as vehicles, the vehicles of divine beings and human beings and the low vehicle (Hinayana), the great vehicle (Mahayana), and the vehicle of Tantra.

The vehicles of human and divine beings here refer to the system which outlines the methods and techniques for bringing about a betterment within this life or attaining a favourable rebirth in the future as a human or god. Such a system highlights the importance of maintaining good behaviour. By performing good deeds and refraining from negative actions we can lead righteous lives and be able to maintain a favourable rebirth in the future.

The Buddha also spoke of another category of vehicle, the Brahma vehicle, which comprises techniques of meditation by which a person withdraws his or her attention from external objects and draws the mind within, trying to cultivate single-pointed concentration. Through such techniques one is able to attain the highest form of life possible within cyclic existence.

From a Buddhist point of view, because these various systems bring great benefit to many living beings, they are all worthy of respect. Yet, these systems do not provide any method for achieving liberation, that is, freedom from suffering and the cycle of existence. Methods for achieving such a state of liberation enable us to overcome ignorance, which is the root cause of our spinning in the cycle existence. And the system containing methods for obtaining freedom from this cycle existence is referred to as the Hearer's or Solitary Realizer's vehicle.

In this system, the view of selflessness is explained only in terms of the person not of phenomena, whereas in the great vehicle system, the view of selflessness is not confined to the person alone, but encompasses all phenomena. When this view of selflessness gives rise to a profound understanding, we will be able to eliminate not only ignorance and the disturbing emotions derived from it, but also the imprints left by them. This system is called the great vehicle.

The highest vehicle is known as the Tantric vehicle which comprises not only techniques for heightening your own realization of emptiness or mind of enlightenment, but also certain technique for penetrating the vital points of the body. By using the body's physical elements, we can expedite the process of realization, eliminating ignorance and its imprints. This is the main feature of the tantric vehicle.

I would now like to explain these points in greater detail from an evolutionary or historical point of view.



According to the viewpoint of the Kashmiri Pandit Shakyashri, who came to Tibet, Lord Buddha lived in India 2500 years ago. This accords with the popular Theravadin view, but according to some Tibetan scholars, Buddha appeared in the world more than 3000 years ago. Another group says it was more than 2800 years. These different proponents try to support their theories with different reasons, but in the end they are quite vague.

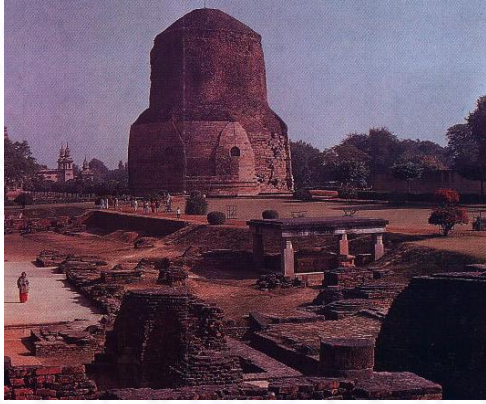
I personally feel it is quite disgraceful that nobody, not even among Buddhists, knows when our teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha, actually lived. I have been seriously considering whether some scientific research could be done. Relics are available in India and Tibet, which people believe derive from the Buddha himself. If these were examined with modern techniques, we might be able to establish some accurate dates, which would be very helpful.

We know that historically the Buddha was born as an ordinary person like ourselves. He was brought up as a prince, married and had a son. Then, after observing the suffering of human beings, aging, sickness, and death, he totally renounced the worldly way of life. He underwent severe physical penances and with great effort undertook long meditation, eventually becoming completely enlightened.

I feel the way he demonstrated how to become totally enlightened set a very good example for his followers, for this is the way in which we should pursue our own spiritual path. Purifying your own mind is not at all easy, it takes a lot of time and hard work. Therefore, if you choose to follow this teaching you need tremendous willpower and determination right from the start, accepting that there will be many, many obstacles, and resolving that despite all of them you will continue the practice. This kind of determination is very important. Sometimes, it may seem to us that although Buddha Shakyamuni attained enlightenment through great sacrifice and hard work, we his followers can easily attain Buddhahood without the hard work and difficulties that he underwent. So, I think that the Buddha's own story has something to tell us.



According to popular legend, after his complete enlightenment, the Buddha gave no public teaching for 49 days. He gave his first discourse to the five who had formerly been his colleagues when he lived as a mendicant. Because he had broken his physical penances they had abandoned him and even after he had become totally enlightened they had no thoughts of reconciliation towards him. However, meeting the Buddha on his way, they naturally and involuntarily paid him respect, as a result of which he gave them his first teaching.



### **The First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma**

This first teaching, known as the first turning of the wheel of dharma, he gave on the basis of the four noble truths. As most of you may know, these four noble truths are the truth of suffering, the truth of its origin, the truth of cessation and the path leading to cessation.

When he taught the four noble truths, according to the sutra we find in the Tibetan edition, he taught them in the context of three factors: the nature of the truths themselves, their functions and their effects.

The four noble truths are really very profound for the entire Buddhist doctrine can be presented within them. What we seek is happiness and happiness is the effect of a cause and what we don't want is suffering and suffering has its own causes too.

In view of the importance of the four noble truths, I often remark that the both the Buddha view of dependent arising and the Buddhist conduct of nonharming emphasize the conduct of nonviolence. The simple reason for this is that suffering comes about unwanted due to its cause, which is basically our own ignorant and undisciplined minds. If we want to avoid suffering, we have to restrain ourselves from negative actions which give rise to suffering. And because suffering is related to its causes the view of dependent arising comes in. Effects depend upon their causes and if you don't want the effects, you have to put an end to their causes.

So, in the four noble truths we find two sets of causes and effects: suffering is the effect and its origin is the cause. In the same manner, cessation is peace and the path leading to it is the cause of that peace.

The happiness we seek can be achieved by bringing about discipline and transformation within our minds, that is purifying our minds. Purification of our minds is possible when we eliminate ignorance, which is at the root of all disturbing emotions, and through that, we can achieve that state of cessation

which is true peace and happiness. That cessation can be achieved only when we are able to realize the nature of phenomena, to penetrate the nature of reality, and to do this the training in wisdom is important. When it is combined with the faculty of single-pointedness we will be able to channel all our energy and attention towards a single object or virtue. Therefore, the training in concentration and wisdom to be successful requires a very stable foundation of morality, so the practice of morality or ethics come in here.

## **Ethics**

Just as there are three types of training - in wisdom, concentration, and morality - the Buddhist scriptures contain three divisions - discipline, sets of discourses, and knowledge.

Both male and female practitioners have an equal need to practise these three trainings although there are differences in the vows they take.

The basic foundation of the practice of morality is restraint from the ten unwholesome actions: three pertaining to the body, four pertaining to speech and three pertaining to thought.

The three physical nonvirtues are:

1. Taking the life of a living being, from an insect up to a human being.
2. Stealing, taking away another's property without his consent, regardless of its value, and whether or not you do it yourself.
3. Sexual misconduct, committing adultery.

The four verbal nonvirtues are:

4. Lying, deceiving others through spoken word or gesture.
5. Divisiveness, creating dissension by causing those in agreement to disagree or those in disagreement to disagree further.
6. Harshness, abusing others.
7. Senselessness, talking about foolish things motivated by desire and so forth.

The three mental nonvirtues are:

8. Covetousness, desiring to possess something that belongs to another.
9. Harmful intent, wishing to injure others, be it in a great or small way.
10. Wrong view, viewing some existent thing, such as rebirth, cause and effect, or the Three Jewels as nonexistent.

The morality practised by those who observe the monastic way of life is referred to as the discipline of individual liberation (Pratimoksha). In India, there were four major schools of tenets, later producing

eighteen branches, which each preserved their own version of the Pratimoksha, the original discourse spoken by the Buddha, which laid down the guidelines for monastic life. The practice observed in the Tibetan monasteries follows the Mulasarvastavadin tradition in which 253 precepts are prescribed for fully ordained monks or Bhikshus. In the Theravadin tradition the individual liberation vow of monks comprises 227 precepts.

In providing you with an instrument of mindfulness and alertness, the practice of morality protects you from indulging in negative actions. Therefore it is the foundation of the Buddhist path. The second phase is meditation, which leads the practitioner to the second training which is concerned with concentration.

## **Concentration**

When we talk of meditation in the general Buddhist sense, there are two types - absorptive and analytical meditation. The first refers to the practice of the calmly abiding or single-pointed mind and the second to the practice of analysis. In both cases, it is very important to have a very firm foundation of mindfulness and alertness, which is provided by the practice of morality. These two factors, mindfulness and alertness, are important not only in meditation, but also in our day to day life.

We speak of many different states of meditation, such as the form or formless states. The form states are differentiated on the basis of their branches, whereas the formless states are differentiated on the basis of the nature of the object of absorption.

We take the practice of morality as the foundation and the practice of concentration as a complementary factor, an instrument, to make the mind serviceable. So, later, when you undertake the practice of wisdom, you meditate on the selflessness or emptiness of phenomena, which serves as the actual antidote to the disturbing emotions.

## **The Thirty-seven Aspects of Enlightenment**

The general structure of the Buddhist path, as outlined in the first turning of the wheel of the dharma, consists of the thirty-seven aspects of enlightenment. These begin with the four mindfulnesses, which refer to mindfulness of the body, feeling, mind and phenomena. Here, however, mindfulness refers to meditation on the suffering nature of cycle existence by which practitioners develop a true determination to be free from this cycle of existence.

Next are the four complete abandonments, because when practitioners develop a true determination to be free through the practice of the four mindfulnesses, they engage in a way of life in which they abandon the causes of future suffering and cultivate the causes of future happiness.

Since overcoming all negative actions and disturbing emotions and increasing positive factors within your mind, which are technically called the class of pure phenomena, can be achieved only when you have a very concentrated mind, there follow what are called the four factors of miraculous powers.

Next come what are known as the five faculties, five powers, eightfold noble path and seven branches of the path to enlightenment.

This is the general structure of the Buddhist path as laid down in the first turning of the wheel of dharma. Buddhism as practised in the Tibetan tradition completely incorporates all these features of Buddhist doctrine.



## **The Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma**

In the second turning of the wheel of dharma, the Buddha taught the Perfection of Wisdom or Prajnaparamita sutras, on the Vultures Peak, outside Rajgir.

The second turning of the wheel of dharma should be seen as expanding upon the topics which the Buddha had expounded during the first turning of the wheel. In the second turning, he taught not only the truth of suffering, that suffering should be recognized as suffering, but emphasized the importance of identifying both your own suffering as well as that of all sentient beings, so it is much more extensive. When he taught the origin of all suffering in the second turning of the wheel of dharma, he referred not to the disturbing emotions alone, but also to the subtle imprints they leave behind, so this explanation is more profound.

The truth of cessation is also explained much more profoundly. In the first turning of the wheel of dharma cessation is merely identified, whereas in the Perfection of Wisdom sutras the Buddha explains the nature of this cessation and its characteristics in great detail. He describes the path by which sufferings can be ceased and what the actual state called cessation is.

The truth of path is similarly dealt with more profoundly in the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras. The Buddha taught an unique path comprising the realization of emptiness, the true nature of all phenomena, combined with compassion and the mind of enlightenment, the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Because he spoke of this union of method and wisdom in the second wheel of dharma, we find that the second turning expands and develops on the first turning of the wheel of the dharma.

Although the four noble truths were explained more profoundly during the second turning of the wheel of dharma, this is not because certain features were explained in the second that were not explained in the first. That cannot be the reason, because many topics are explained in non Buddhist systems which are not explained in Buddhism, but that does not mean that other systems are more profound than

**Buddhism.** The second turning of the wheel of dharma explains and develops certain aspects of the four noble truths, which were not explained in the first turning of the wheel, but which do not contradict the general structure of the Buddhist path described in that first discourse. Therefore, the explanation found in the second is said to be more profound.

Yet, in the discourses of the second turning of the wheel we also find certain presentations that do contradict the general structure of the path as described in the first, thus the great vehicle speaks of two categories of sutras, some which are taken at face value and are thought of as literally true, whereas other require further interpretation. So, based on the great vehicle approach of the four reliances, we divide the sutras into two categories, the definitive and interpretable.

These four reliances consist of advice to rely on the teaching, not on the person; within the teachings rely on the meaning, not on mere words; rely on definitive sutras, not those requiring interpretation; and rely on the deeper understanding of wisdom, not on the knowledge of ordinary awareness.

This approach can be found in the Buddha's own words, as when he said, 'O, Bhikshus and wise men, do not accept what I say just out of respect for me, but first subject it to analysis and rigorous examination.'

In the second turning of the wheel of dharma, the Perfection of Wisdom sutras, the Buddha further explained the subject of cessation, particularly with regard to emptiness, in a more elaborate and extensive way. Therefore, the great vehicle approach is to interpret those sutras on two levels: the literal meaning, which concerns the presentation of emptiness, and the hidden meaning which concerns the latent explanation of the stages of the path.

### **The Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma**



The third turning of the wheel contains many different sutras, the most important of which is the



*Tathagata Essence* sutra, which is actually the source for Nagarjuna's collection of praises and also Maitreya's treatise the *Sublime Continuum*. In this sutra, the Buddha further explores topics he had touched on in the second turning of the wheel, but not from the objective viewpoint of emptiness, because emptiness was explained to its fullest, highest and most profound degree in the second turning. What unique about the third turning is that Buddha taught certain ways of heightening the wisdom which realizes emptiness from the point of view of subjective mind.

The Buddha's explanation of the view of emptiness in the second turning of the wheel, in which he taught about the lack of inherent existence, was too profound for many practitioners to comprehend. For some, to say phenomena lack inherent existence seems to imply that they do not exist at all. So, for the benefit of these practitioners, in the third turning of the wheel the Buddha qualified the object of emptiness with different interpretations.

For example, in the *Sutra Unravelling the Thought of the Buddha* he differentiated various types of emptiness by categorizing all phenomena into three classes: imputed phenomena, dependent phenomena and thoroughly established phenomena, which refers to their empty nature. He spoke of the various emptinesses of these different phenomena, the various ways of lacking inherent existence of these different phenomena. So, the two major schools of thought of the great vehicle, the Middle Way (Madhyamika) and the Mind Only (Chittamatra) schools, arose in India on the basis of these differences of presentation.

Next is the tantric vehicle, which I think has some connection with the third turning of the wheel. The word 'tantra' means 'continuity'. The Yoga Tantra text called the *Ornament of the Vajra Essence Tantra* explains that tantra is a continuity referring to the continuity of consciousness or mind. It is on the basis of this mind that on the ordinary level we commit negative actions, as a result of which we go through the vicious cycle of life and death. On the spiritual path, it is also on the basis of this continuity of consciousness that we are able to make mental improvements, experience high realizations of the path and so forth. And it is also on the basis of this continuity of consciousness that we are able to achieve the ultimate state of omniscience. So, this continuity of consciousness is always present, which is the meaning of tantra or continuity.

I feel there is a bridge between the sutras and tantras in the second and third turnings of the wheel, because in the second, the Buddha taught certain sutras which have different levels of meaning. The explicit meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra is emptiness, whereas the implicit meaning is the stages of the path which are to be achieved as a result of realizing emptiness. The third turning was concerned with different ways of heightening the wisdom which realizes emptiness. So I think there is a link between sutra and tantra.

## **Different Explanations of Selflessness**

From a philosophical point of view, the criterion for distinguishing a school as Buddhist is whether or not it accepts the four seals: that all composite phenomena are impermanent by nature, contaminated

phenomena are of the nature of suffering, all phenomena are empty and selfless and nirvana alone is peace. Any system accepting these seals is philosophically a Buddhist school of thought. In the great vehicle schools of thought, selflessness is explained more profoundly, at a deeper level.

Now, let me explain the difference between selflessness as explained in the second turning of the wheel and that explained in the first.

Let us examine our own experience, how we relate to things. For example, when I use this rosary here, I feel it is mine and I have attachment to it. If you examine the attachment you feel for your own possessions, you find there are different levels of attachment. One is the feeling that there is a self-sufficient person existing as a separate entity independent of your own body and mind, which feels that this rosary is 'mine'.

When you are able, through meditation, to perceive the absence of such a self-sufficient person, existing in isolation from your own body and mind, you are able to reduce the strong attachment you feel towards your possessions. But you may also feel that there are still some subtle levels of attachment. Although you may not feel a subjective attachment from your own side in relation to the person, because of the rosary's beautiful appearance, its beautiful colour and so forth, you feel a certain level of attachment to it, that a certain level of attachment to it, that a certain objective entity exists out there. So, in the second turning of the wheel, the Buddha taught that selflessness is not confined to the person alone, but that it applies to all phenomena. When you realize this, you will be able to overcome all forms of attachments and delusion.



Just as Chandrakirti said in his *Supplement to Nagarjuna's 'Treatise on the Middle Way'*, the selflessness explained in the lower schools of tenets, which confine their explanation of selflessness only to the person, is not a complete form of selflessness. Even if you realize that selflessness, you will still have subtle levels of clinging and attachment to external objects, like your possessions and so forth.

Although the view of selflessness is common to all Buddhist schools of thought, there were differences of presentation. That of the higher schools is more profound in comparison with that of the lower schools of thought. One reason is that even though you may have realized the selflessness of persons, as described by the lower schools, in terms of a person not being a self-sufficient or substantially existent entity, you may still cling to a certain misconception of self, approaching the person as inherently, independently or truly existent.

As realization of the selflessness of persons becomes increasingly subtle, you realize that the person lacks any form of independent nature or inherent existence. Then there is no way you can apprehend a

self-sufficient person. Therefore, the presentation of selflessness in the higher schools is much deeper and more profound than that of the lower schools.

The way the higher schools explain selflessness is not only more powerful in counteracting the misconception of the true existence of persons and phenomena, but also does not contradict phenomena's conventional reality. Phenomena do exist on a conventional basis, and the realization of emptiness does not affect this.

The Buddha's different presentations of selflessness should be viewed in order as providing background for the Buddhist view of dependent arising. When Buddhists speak of dependent arising, they do so in terms of afflictive phenomena that are causes of suffering, whose consequences are suffering. This is explained in terms of 'the twelve links of dependent arising', which comprise those factors completed within one cycle of rebirth within the cycle of existence. Therefore, dependent arising is at the root of the Buddhist view.

If you do not understand selflessness in terms of dependent arising, you will not understand selflessness completely. People's mental faculties are different. For some, when it is explained that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence, it may seem that nothing exists at all. Such an understanding is very dangerous and harmful, because it can cause you to fall into the extreme of nihilism. Therefore, Buddha taught selflessness roughly for persons with such mental faculties. For practitioners of higher faculties, he taught selflessness on a subtler level. Still, no matter how subtle the realization of emptiness may be, it does not harm their conviction in phenomena's conventional existence.

So, your understanding of emptiness should complement your understanding of dependent arising, and that understanding of emptiness should further reaffirm your conviction in the law of cause and effect.

If you were to analyze the higher schools' presentation from the viewpoint of the lower schools, you should find no contradiction or logical inconsistencies in them. Whereas, if you were to consider the lower schools' presentation from the viewpoint of the higher schools, you would find many logical inconsistencies.

## **The Four Seals**

The four seals mentioned above have profound implications for a Buddhist practitioner. The first seal states that all compounded phenomena are impermanent. The question of impermanence has been expounded most fully by the Sutra Follower (Sautrantika) school, which explains that all compounded phenomena are by nature impermanent, in the sense that due to its being produced from a cause a phenomenon is by nature impermanent or disintegrating. If something is produced from a cause, no secondary cause is required for it to disintegrate. The moment that it was produced from the cause, the process of disintegration has already begun. Therefore, its disintegration requires no further cause. This is the subtle meaning of impermanence, that anything produced by causes is 'other-powered' in the sense

that it depends upon causes and conditions and therefore is subject to change and disintegration.

This is very close to the physicists explanation of nature, the momentariness of phenomena.

The second seal states that all contaminated phenomena are of the nature of suffering. Here, contaminated phenomena refers to the type of phenomena which are produced by contaminated actions and disturbing emotions. As explained above, something that is produced is 'other-powered' in the sense that it is dependent on causes. In this case causes refer to our ignorance and disturbing emotions. Contaminated actions and ignorance constitute a negative phenomena, a misconception of reality, and as long as something is under such a negative influence, it will be of the nature of suffering. Here, suffering does not only imply overt physical suffering, but can also be understood as of the nature of dissatisfaction.

By contemplating these two seals concerning the impermanent and suffering nature of contaminated phenomena , we will be able to develop a genuine sense of renunciation, the determination to be free from suffering. The question then arises, is it possible for us ever to obtain such a state of freedom? This is where the third seal, that all phenomena are empty and selfless, comes in.

Our experience of suffering comes about due to causes and conditions, which are contaminated actions and the ignorance which induced them. This ignorance is a misconception. It has no valid support and, because it apprehends phenomena in a manner contrary to the way they really are, it is distorted, erroneous and contradicts reality. Now, if we can clear away this misconception, the cessation (of suffering) becomes possible. If we penetrate the nature of reality, it is also possible to achieve that cessation within our minds and as the fourth seal states, such a cessation or liberation is true peace.

When we take into account the different explanations of various philosophical schools within Buddhism, including the great vehicle schools, it is necessary to discriminate those sutras that are definitive and those requiring further interpretation. If we were to make these distinctions on the basis of scriptural texts alone, we would have to verify the scripture we used for determining whether something was interpretable or definitive against another sutra, and because this would continue in an infinite regression it would not be a very reliable method. Therefore, we have to determine whether a sutra is definitive or interpretable on the basis of logic. So, when we speak of the great vehicle philosophical schools, reason is more important than the scripture.

How do we determine whether something is interpretable? There are different types of scriptures belonging to the interpretable category, for instance, certain sutras mention that one's parents are to be killed. Now, since these sutras cannot be taken literally, at face value, they require further interpretation. The reference here to parents is to the contaminated actions and attachment which brings about rebirth in the future.

Similarly, in tantras such as Guhyasamaja the Buddha says that the Tathagata or Buddha is to be killed and that if you kill the Buddha, you will achieve supreme enlightenment.



It is obvious that these scriptures require further interpretation. However, other sutras are less obviously interpretable. The sutra which explains the twelve links of dependent arising, states that because of the cause, the fruits ensue. An example is that because of ignorance within, contaminated actions come about. Although the content of this type of sutra is true on one level, it is categorized as interpretable, because when ignorance is said to induce contaminated action, it does not refer to the ultimate point of view. It is only on the conventional level that something can produce something else. From the ultimate point of view, its nature is emptiness. So, because there is a further, deeper level not referred to in these sutras, they are said to be interpretable.

Definitive sutras are those sutras, like the *Heart of Wisdom*, in which the Buddha spoke of the ultimate nature of phenomena, that form of emptiness and emptiness is form; apart from form, there is no emptiness. Because such sutras speak of the ultimate nature of phenomena, their ultimate mode of existence, emptiness, they are said to be definitive. However, we should also note that there are different ways of discriminating between definitive and interpretable sutras among different Buddhist schools of thought.



In short, the texts of the Middle Way Consequentialist (Madhyamika Prasangika) school, particularly those by Nagarjuna and his disciple Chandrakirti, are definitive and expounded the view of emptiness the Buddha taught to its fullest extent. The view of emptiness expounded in these texts is not contradicted by logical reasoning, but rather is supported by it.

Amongst the definitive sutras are also included sutras belonging to the third turning of the wheel of doctrine, particularly the *Tathagata Essence Sutra*, which is actually the fundamental source of such Middle Way treatises as the *Sublime Continuum* and the *Collection of Praises* written by Nagarjuna. Also included in the third turning were other sutras such as the *Sutra Unravelling the Thought of the Buddha*, which according to some Tibetan masters are also categorized as definitive.

These scholars (such as the Jonangpas) maintain a unique view of emptiness, which is technically called 'emptiness of other', and they speak of different kinds of emptiness qualifying different phenomena. They maintain that conventional phenomena are empty of themselves and ultimate phenomena are empty of conventional phenomena.



You could interpret this explanation of emptiness, that conventional phenomena are empty of themselves, to mean that because conventional phenomena are not their own ultimate nature, they are empty of themselves. But these Tibetan scholars do not interpret it in such a way, they maintain that because phenomena are empty of themselves, they do not exist.



As we know from history that many masters belonging to this group of scholars actually achieved high realizations of the generation and completion stages of tantra, they must have had a profound understanding of their particular interpretation of emptiness. But if we were to interpret emptiness as things being empty of themselves in such a manner that they do not exist at all, it would be like saying that nothing exists at all.

Because they maintain that conventional phenomena do not exist, being empty of themselves, they maintain that their ultimate nature is truly existent phenomenon that exists in its own right, is inherent existent. And when they speak of the emptiness of this ultimate truth they refer to its being empty of being a conventional phenomenon.

Dharmashri, the son of Yumo Mingur Dorje, one of the proponents of this view, stated in a text I once read that Nagarjuna's view of emptiness was a nihilistic view.

So, these systems of thought maintain that since conventional phenomena are empty of themselves, the only thing that exists is ultimate truth and that ultimate truth exists truly and inherently.

It is obvious that adherence to such a philosophical point of view directly contradicts the view of emptiness explained in the Perfection of Wisdom sutras, in which the Buddha has stated explicitly and clearly that as far as empty nature is concerned, there is no discrimination between conventional and ultimate phenomena. He has explained the emptiness of ultimate phenomena by using many different synonyms for ultimate truth, indicating that from form up to omniscience, all phenomena are equally empty.

Although Middle Way Consequentialists, proponents of the highest Buddhist philosophical tenets, speak of phenomena being empty and having an empty nature, this is not to say that phenomena does not exist at all. Rather that phenomena do not exist in or of themselves, in their own right, or inherently. The fact is that phenomena have the characteristics of existence, such as arising in dependence on other factors or causal conditions. Therefore, lacking any independent nature, phenomena are dependent. The very fact that they are by nature dependent. The very fact that they are by nature dependent on other factors is an indication of their lacking an independent nature. So, when Middle Way Consequentialists speak of emptiness, they speak of the dependent nature of phenomena in terms of dependent arising.

Therefore, an understanding of emptiness does not contradict the conventional reality of phenomena.

Because phenomena arise in dependence on other factors, causal conditions and so forth, the Middle Way Consequentialists use their dependent nature as the final ground for establishing their empty nature. Lacking an independent nature, they lack inherent existence. The reasoning of dependent arising is very powerful, not only because it dispels the misconception that things exist inherently, but because at the same time it protects a person from falling into the extreme of nihilism.

In Nagarjuna's own writings, we find that emptiness has to be understood in the context of dependent arising. In the *Fundamental Text Called Wisdom*, Nagarjuna says, 'Since there is no phenomena which is not a dependent arising, there is no phenomenon which is not empty.'

It is clear that Nagarjuna's view of emptiness has to be understood in the context of dependent arising, not only from his own writings, but also those of later commentators such as Buddhapalita, who is very concise but clear, and Chandrakirti in his *Commentary on Nagarjuna's 'Treatise on the Middle Way', Clear Words*, his *Supplement to (Nagarjuna's) 'Treatise on the Middle Way'* his auto-commentary to it and also his *Commentary on Aryadeva's 'Four Hundred'*. If you were to compare all these texts, it would become very clear that the view of emptiness as expounded by Nagarjuna has to be understood in terms of dependent arising. And when you read these commentaries, you begin to feel great appreciation for Nagarjuna.



This is a brief explanation of the sutra system of the Buddhist path.

## Introduction to the Tantras

There is an explanation of the evolution of the Tantras from a historical point view, according to which the Buddha taught the different Tantras at certain times and so forth. However, I think that the Tantric teachings could also have come about as a result of individuals having achieved high realizations and having been able to explore the physical elements and the potential within the body to its fullest extent. As a result of this, they might have had high realizations and visions and so may have received tantric teachings. Therefore, when we think about tantric teachings we should not have this rigid view of a particular historical time.





In the fundamental tantra of Kalachakra, the Buddha himself says that when he gave the second turning of the wheel of dharma at Vulture's Peak, he also gave a different system of tantric teachings at the place called Dhanyakataka. There is a difference of opinion among Tibetan scholars concerning the evolution of the tantric teachings, including the Kalachakra Tantra. One system maintains that the Buddha gave the tantric teachings on the full moon day one year after his complete enlightenment, whereas a second system maintains that he gave the tantric teachings one month prior to his *parinirvana*.

The second view seems to be more consistent because the Kalachakra tantra itself says that just as the Buddha gave the second turning of the wheel of the dharma at Vulture's Peak, he gave tantric teachings at Dhanyakataka. It seems that among the lower sets of tantra there are a few which the Buddha taught in his normal form as a fully ordained monk or Bhikshu, but in general, when he taught most of the tantras, he assumed the form of the principal deity of the particular tantra.

The practice of tantra can be undertaken when a person has gained a firm foundation in the path presented in the sutra system. This consists of a correct view of emptiness, as it was explained in the second turning of the wheel, and a realization of the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings, based on love and compassion, together with the practices of the six perfections. So only after you have laid a proper foundation in the common paths can you undertake the practice of tantra as an additional factor.

The greatest profundities can be found in Highest Yoga Tantra. This is where you can come to understand the term, 'Buddha-nature' or 'essence of Buddhahood', in other words, the uncontaminated awareness explained in the *Sublime Continuum*. The deepest meaning of this can only be understood in the Highest Yoga Tantra.

Irrespective of whether we maintain that the *Sublime Continuum* itself deals with Buddha nature in its fullest form, it is very clear that the ultimate intent of Buddhahood is the fundamental innate mind of clear light. When you are able to transform the fundamental innate mind of clear light into the entity of the path, you are equipped with a very powerful instrument.

Usually, in practising single-pointed meditation, we are functioning on a gross mental level and so require a strong degree of mindfulness and alertness to prevent our concentration from being distracted. If there were a technique or method by which we could do away with the distractions associated with

these gross levels of mind, there would be no need for such rigorous vigilance and mindfulness. Highest Yoga Tantra explains methods by which you can dissolve and withdraw all the gross levels of mind and bring your mind to a level at which there is no possibility of distractions arising.

In addition, the method for bringing that fundamental innate mind of clear light, the subtlest level of mind, into the entity of the path according to Highest Yoga Tantra, is to dissolve or withdraw the gross levels of mind and the energies that propel them. There are three major ways of doing this. One is by means of wind yoga, another is through experiencing the four types of bliss, and the third is through meditation on nonconceptuality.

Here, it should be remembered that although these are different methods, we can achieve these feats by means of any of these three techniques. We should be aware that these feats can be achieved not only by one method, but through a collection of many different methods. For example, if we generate a virtuous thought a day, although this virtuous thought can serve as a cause for attaining omniscience in the future, this does not mean that this virtuous thought alone is the cause of omniscience.

A text called the *Sacred Words of Manjushri*, composed by the Indian master Buddhajñana, mentions that because of the physical structure of our bodies and the elements that we possess as human beings inhabiting this planet, even on an ordinary level, there are certain occasions when we experience the subtle level of clear light, naturally. These occur during sleep, yawning, fainting and sexual climax.

This shows that we have within ourselves a certain potential which we can explore further. And among these four states, the best opportunity for further development is during the sexual intercourse.

Although I am using this ordinary term, sexual climax, it does not imply the ordinary sexual act. The reference here is to the experience of entering into union with a consort of the opposite sex, by means of which the elements at the crown are melted, and through the power of meditation the process is also reversed.

A prerequisite of such a practice is that you should be able to protect yourself from the fault of seminal emission. According to the explanation of the Kalachakra Tantra in particular, such emission is said to be very damaging to your practice. Therefore, because you should not experience emission even in dreams, the tantras describe different techniques for overcoming this fault.

This contrasts with the Vinaya explanation, which sets out the code of discipline for Buddhist monks, in which exception is made for emission in dreams, because it is beyond your control, whereas in tantra it is considered an offence. The experience of melting the mind of enlightenment is brought about by ordinary afflicted desire, so the practitioner must be able to generate it.

The point is that due to the force of desire, you are able to melt the elements within your body. Consequently, when you experience the nonconceptual state, you should be able to direct your attention to meditation on emptiness. So, when you experience a nonconceptual state as a result of the elements

melting within your body, if you are able to generate that understanding into a realization of emptiness, you will have achieved the feat of transforming a disturbing emotion, desire, into the wisdom realizing emptiness.

When you are able to employ this nonconceptual blissful mind in realizing emptiness, the result is a powerful wisdom that serves as an antidote to counteract and eliminate disturbing emotions. Therefore, it is a case of wisdom derived from disturbing emotions counteracting and eliminating them, just as insects born from wood consume it.

This is the significance of the Buddha's assuming the form of a meditational deity, the principal deity of the mandala, and entering into union with the consort when he taught the tantric path. Therefore, in the course of their practice, practitioners generate themselves on an imaginary level into such deities in union with a consort.

Another unique and profound feature of tantra concerns the process for attaining the twofold body of the Buddha, the form body and the truth body. According to the sutra system, the practitioner works to attain the form and the truth bodies of a Buddha as a result of cultivating the altruistic aspiration for enlightenment. However, the body of the Buddha does not come about without causes and conditions and these causes and conditions must be commensurate their effects. That is to say, cause and effect should have similar aspects.

The sutra systems speak of the causes of the Buddha's form body in terms of a unique mental body attained by highly evolved Bodhisattvas, which, serving as the substantial cause of the Buddha's body, eventually becomes the form body of the Buddha. This is also mentioned in the writings of the low vehicle. Although they do not describe a complete method for actualizing the omniscient state, they do speak of certain types of practices which are geared towards achieving the major and minor marks of the Buddha.

Highest Yoga Tantra, on the other hand, outlines the unique causes and methods for actualizing both the truth body and the form body of a Buddha.

In order to undertake the practice of a method which serves as the principal or substantial cause for attaining the form body of a Buddha, the practitioner of tantra should first ripen his mental faculties. In other words, he should rehearse this unique cause. The importance of deity yoga, which employs imagination in meditation, is that the practitioner generates himself or herself into the aspect of a deity.

Texts such as the explanatory tantra called the *Vajrapanjara Tantra* and related Indian commentaries point out that attainment of the Buddha's truth body requires meditation and practice of a path that has features similar to the resultant truth body. This refers to meditation on emptiness through direct perception in which all dualistic appearances and conceptual elaborations have been withdrawn. Similarly, in order to attain the form body of the Buddha one should also cultivate a path that has similar features to the resultant form body. Engaging in a path that has similar features to the resultant state of

Buddhahood, particularly the form body, is of indispensable significance and power. The tantras present a path that has features, technically called the four complete purities, similar to the resultant state in four ways: the complete purity of enlightenment, the complete purity of the body, the complete purity of the resources, and the complete purity of activities.

All great vehicle systems assert that in order to achieve the resultant state, that is the union of the two bodies, it is essential to engage in a path in which there is a union of method and wisdom. However, the union of wisdom and method according to the sutra system is not a complete union. Although it refers to wisdom in terms of the wisdom realizing emptiness and method in the terms of the practice of the six perfection such as giving, ethics and so forth, the union of method and wisdom here refers only to the practice of wisdom realizing emptiness being complemented by a factor of method such as the mind of enlightenment, and the practice of the mind of enlightenment and aspects of method being complemented and supported by a factor of wisdom such as realization of emptiness. In other words, they maintain that it is not possible for both factors of the path, the wisdom factor and method factor, to be present within one entity of consciousness.

Such a form of practice is a relative union of method and wisdom. The practise of wisdom is not isolated from factors of method, nor is the practise of method isolated from factors of wisdom, yet it is not a complete form of union of method and wisdom. Tantra alone can serve as the ultimate cause or path for realizing the resultant state of Buddhahood, in which there is a complete unity between the form body and the truth body.

The question is what form of practice or path is possible where method and wisdom are inseparably united. In the practise of tantra, it is deity yoga in which the divine form of a deity is visualized in a single moment of consciousness, while at the same time there is mindfulness of its empty nature, its emptiness. There, within one entity of consciousness, is meditation on both the deity as well as apprehension of emptiness. Therefore, such a moment of consciousness is a factor of both method and wisdom.

Also, when we try to cultivate divine pride or the sense of identity as a divine being in the practice of deity yoga, we try to overcome the feeling and perception of an ordinariness. I think this helps us to make the potential of Buddhahood within ourselves more manifest.

To attain a firm pride of being a deity requires a stable visualization of the form and appearance of the deity. Normally, because of our natural tendency and consequent notion of self we have an innate feeling of 'I' and 'self' based upon our body and mind. If we similarly cultivate a strong perception of our own appearance as a deity, we will also be able to cultivate divine pride, the sense of identity as a deity, by focusing on the divine body.

In order to actualize the omniscient mind within ourselves, we need to develop the substantial cause for such a mind, which is not just any form of consciousness, but a consciousness with an enduring continuity. That is to say, the mind whose emptiness we realize in order to actualize omniscience, should

be a special type of mind which, in terms of its continuity, is permanent. Contaminated states of mind, such as disturbing emotions and so forth, are adventitious. Therefore, they are occasional. They arise at a certain moment, but they disappear. So, although they are disadvantageous, they do not endure, whereas the mind whose nature we realize when we become omniscient should be permanent in terms of its continuity not adventitious.

This means, that we should be able to realize the empty nature of the purified mind, the mind that has never been polluted by the influence of disturbing emotions.

Now, from the point of view of emptiness itself, although there is no difference between the emptiness of external phenomena, such as a sprout, and the emptiness of a deity, such as oneself generated into a deity like Vairochana, from the point of view of the subjects qualified by emptiness there is difference.



The importance of deity yoga is that it is the special type of wisdom that realizes the emptiness of this deity that eventually serves as the substantial cause for the omniscient mind of Buddhahood. Deity yoga, therefore, is a union of clarity, which is the visualization of the deity, and the profound, which is the realization of emptiness.

Now, according to the sutra system the Buddha never approved the generation of disturbing emotions for one's own welfare, or from the point of view of one's own realization of the path. But there are occasions mentioned in the sutras, where a Bodhisattva, who finds that the application of certain disturbing emotions is useful and beneficial for the purpose of others, is given such approval.

The Buddha said that although excrement is dirty in the town, it is helpful when used as fertilizer in a field. The Bodhisattva's special use of delusions can similarly be of benefit to others.



When, according to the sutra system, the Buddha never approved a Bodhisattva's generating anger or hatred, we often find that for us ordinary people, hatred or anger, being very strong emotional forces, actually help us to get things done.

In the tantras we find that the Buddha has made an exception for the generation of hatred, because we find here techniques and methods for using hatred and anger for positive purposes. However, we must be aware that even when utilizing hatred and anger for positive purposes, the fundamental motive should be the altruistic thought of achieving enlightenment for the benefit of others. When it is induced by such a motive, circumstantial anger or hatred is condoned. The significance of the wrathful aspect of some deities can be understood in this context.

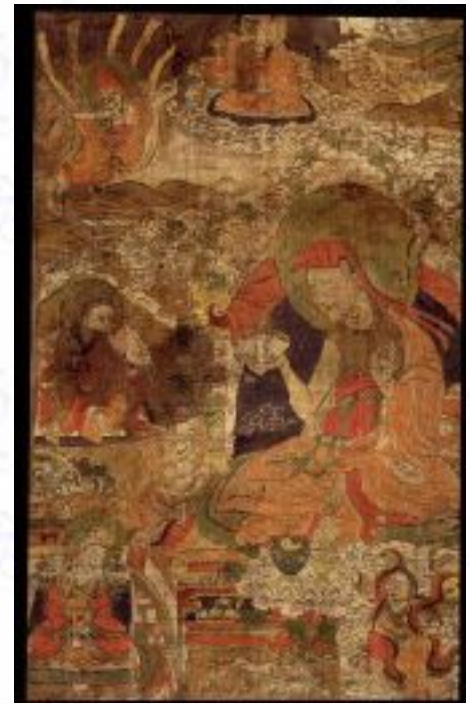
So, these are just some of the differences between the sutra system and the tantric system or, as we might say, the superior features of the tantric path.

### **The Four Classes of Tantra**

The tantric system is divided into four classes, as stated in the explanatory tantra *Vajrapanjara*. As we discussed above, it is only in the Highest Yoga Tantra that the most profound and unique features of tantra come to their fulfilment, therefore, we should view the lower tantras as steps leading up to Highest Yoga Tantra. Although the explanation ways of taking desire into the path is a common feature of all four tantras, the levels of desire differ. In the first class of tantras, Action Tantra, the method for taking desire into the path is to glance at the consort. In the subsequent classes of tantra, the methods include laughter, holding hands or embracing and union.

The four classes of tantras are termed according to their functions and different modes of purification. In the lowest class of tantra mudras or hand gestures are regarded as more important than the inner yoga, so it is called Action Tantra.

The second class, in which there is equal emphasis on both aspects, is called Performance Tantra. The third, Yoga Tantra, is where inner yoga is emphasized more than external activities. The fourth class is called Highest Yoga Tantra because it not only emphasizes the importance of inner yoga, but there is no tantra superior to it.



The explanation of the Nyingma Great Perfection school speaks of nine vehicles. The first three refer to the Hearer (Shravaka), Solitary Realizer (Pratyekabuddha) and Bodhisattva vehicles which constitute the sutra system. The second three are called the external vehicles, comprising Action Tantra, Performance Tantra and Yoga Tantra, since they emphasize the practice of external activities, although they also deal with the practitioner's outer and inner conduct. Finally, there are the three inner tantras, which are referred to in the Great Perfection terminology as Mahayoga, Annuyoga and Atiyoga.

These three inner vehicles are termed the methods or vehicles for gaining control, because they contain methods for making manifest the subtlest levels of mind and energy. By these means a practitioner can place his or her mind in a deep state beyond the discriminations of good or bad, clear or dirty, which enables him or her to transcend such worldly conventions.



### Empowerments

The form of the empowerment or initiation ceremony is quite uniform among the three lower tantras. In Highest Yoga Tantra, however, because of the wide diversity amongst the tantras belonging to this category, there are also different initiations, which serve as ripening factors for the particular tantra to which they belong.

Different types of empowerment are necessary for specific classes of tantras. For example, in the case of Action Tantra, two types of initiations are indispensable: the water empowerment and the crown empowerment. In Performance Tantra, the five wisdom empowerments are indispensable and in Highest Yoga Tantra, all four empowerments, vase, secret, wisdom-knowledge and word initiations are essential.

Nevertheless, many different terms are used in different traditions. In the tradition of the old transmission or Nyingma school, for example, the Vajramaster initiation is called the 'initiation of illusion' and the disciple initiation is called the 'beneficial empowerment' and so forth. There is also an 'all-encompassing Vajra initiation'. In the Great Perfection the fourth initiation itself is further divided into four, the initiation with elaboration and so on.

The term 'initiation', *Abhisheka* in Sanskrit, has many different connotations in different contexts. In a broad sense, initiation may be explained as a ripening factor, or as a causal initiation, then in terms of the path, which is the actual path of release, and finally, initiation of the resultant state, which is the purified result. The Great Perfection also mentions one more type of initiation, the initiation of the basis. This refers to the clear light which serves as a basis and enables other initiations to take place. If a person were to lack the basic faculty of the fundamental innate mind of clear light, it would be impossible for the subsequent empowerments to occur.

In the case of an external phenomena like a vase or a sprout, we cannot talk of a ripening factor, path, resultant state and so on. It is only on the basis of an individual who possesses this kind of faculty within that one can speak of a ripening factor and a path that leads to an eventual resultant state. Thus, broadly speaking there are four initiations.

## **Preparations for Empowerment**

To conduct a ceremony of empowerment one requires a mandala, which is the inestimable mansion or divine residence of the deity. There are different types of mandalas: mandalas created by concentration, painted mandalas, sand mandalas and also in Highest Yoga Tantra, body mandalas based on the body of the Guru, and mandalas of the conventional mind of enlightenment.





Amongst all of these the sand mandala is principal, because it is the only one in preparation of which all the rituals concerning consecration of the site, the strings etc., can be conducted. It also incorporates the performance of ritual dance, which includes various hand gestures and steps.

There are different types of ritual dance. One is conducted when consecrating the site where the mandala is to be built. Another is performed after the completion of the mandala, as an offering to the mandala deities. In addition, there is another type of ceremonial dance called cham, which is associated with activities for overcoming obstacles.

Many small monasteries are expert in performing these ritual dances, but we might question their understanding of the symbolism and significance behind them. Most people consider their performance as a spectacle, a kind of theatrical show. This is a reflection of the sad fact that the tantras are degenerating. I have read in Indian history that one of the factors for the degeneration of tantra and the Buddhist doctrine in India was the excessive proliferation of tantric practices. If a practitioner lacks the basic foundations which are prerequisites for tantric practice, then tantric techniques and meditation may prove to be more harmful than beneficial. That is why tantric practices are called 'secret'.



We should bear in mind that even in tantric writings the monastic vows of individual liberation are highly praised. The fundamental tantra of Kalachakra, which is king of all Highest Yoga Tantras, mentions that of the varieties of vajra masters conducting teachings and ceremonies, fully-ordained monks are the highest, novices are middling and the laymen are the lowest. Moreover, in the course of receiving an initiation there are different types of vows to be taken. Bodhisattva vows can be taken in the presence of an image of the Buddha, without a guru in human form. Individual liberation vows and tantric vows on the other hand must be taken from a living person in the form of a guru.



If you are to make successful progress in the tantric path, it is essential that you receive the inspiration and blessings of the uninterrupted lineage originating with Buddha Vajradhara from your own guru, in order to arouse the latent potential within your mind to actualize the resultant state of Buddhahood. This is achieved by the empowerment ceremony. Therefore, in the practice of tantra, the guru is very important.

Since the guru plays such an important role in the practice of tantra, many tantric texts have outlined the qualifications of a tantric master.

The person giving an initiation should be properly qualified. So before we take initiation, it is important to examine whether the guru has these qualifications. It is said that even if it takes twelve years to determine whether the master possesses the right qualifications, you should take the time to do it.

A qualification vajra master is a person who guards his or her three doors of body, speech and mind from negative actions, a person who is gentle and well-versed in the three trainings of ethics, concentration and wisdom. In addition, he or she should possess the two sets, inner and outer, of ten principals. The *50 Verses on the Guru* describes a person who lacks compassion and is full of spite, is governed by strong forces of attachment and hatred and, having no knowledge of the three trainings, boasts of the little knowledge he has, as unqualified to be a tantric master. But, just as the tantric master should possess certain qualifications, so should the disciples. The current tendency to attend any initiation given by any lama, without prior investigation, and having taken initiation, then to speak against the lama is not good.

On the part of the gurus, it is also important to give teachings in accordance with the general structure of the Buddhist path, taking the general framework of the Buddhist path as the rule by which you determine the integrity of your teachings.

The point is that the teacher should not arrogantly feel that within the close circle of his disciples, he is almighty and can do whatever he wants. There is a saying in Tibetan, 'Even though you may rival the deities in terms of realization, your lifestyle should conform with the ways of others'.

## Maintaining the Vows

Once you have taken the initiation, you have a great responsibility to observe the pledges and vows. In the Action and Performance Tantras, although Bodhisattva vows are required, there is no need to take the tantric vows. Any tantra that includes a vajra master initiation, requires the disciples to observe the tantric vows as well.

If you are paying particular attention to observing practices of the three lower tantras it is important to maintain a vegetarian diet. Although it was reasonable for Tibetans to eat meat in Tibet, because of the climatic conditions and the scarcity of vegetables, in countries where there are vegetables in abundance, it is far better to avoid or reduce your consumption of meat. Particularly when you invite many people to a party, it is good if you can provide vegetarian food.

There is a story of a nomad who visited Lhasa and was surprised to see people eating vegetables. He said, 'People in Lhasa will never starve, they can eat anything green.'

The Buddhist position with regard to diet, even as it is presented in monastic discipline, with the exception of the flesh of certain specific animals, is that there is no general prohibition of meat. Monks in Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand eat meat.

In the scriptural collections of the Bodhisattvas, eating meat is generally prohibited. However, the prohibition is not very strict. In his text called *Heart of the Middle Way*, Bhaviveka deals with the question of vegetarianism in the Buddhist way of life, and concludes that since the animal is already dead when its meat is eaten, it is not directly affected. What is prohibited is eating meat which you know or suspect has been killed for you.

In the three lower classes of tantras, eating meat is strictly prohibited. But in the Highest Yoga Tantra, practitioners are recommended to partake of the five meats and five nectars. The perfect practitioner of Highest Yoga Tantra is someone who is able to transform the five meats and five nectars into purified substances through the power of meditation, and is then able to utilize them to enhance the body's energy. But if someone tried to justify eating meat by claiming to be a Highest Yoga Tantra practitioner, when they came to eat the five meat and nectars they could not be choosy, relishing some and rejecting the others in disgust.

## Women and Buddhism

I think it is also appropriate for me to say something about feminism and women's rights within Buddhism.

In the case of the monastic way of life, although male and female practitioners are afforded equal opportunities in the Discipline texts to take the monastic vows, we find that fully ordained monks are treated as superior in terms of objects of respect and veneration. From this point of view, we might say

that there is some discrimination.

Also in the writings of the low vehicle, we find that a Bodhisattva on the highest level of path who is sure to gain enlightenment in that lifetime is said to be a male. We find a similar explanation in the great vehicle sutras, that a Bodhisattva on the highest level of path, who will definitely achieve enlightenment in the same lifetime is a male abiding in the Blissful Pure Land (Sukhavati). This is also true of the three lower classes of tantra, but the explanation in Highest Yoga Tantra is different.

In Highest Yoga Tantra, even the first step of receiving empowerment is possible only on the basis of the presence of a complete assembly of male and female deities. The Buddhas of the five families must be accompanied by their consorts.



The female role is strongly emphasized in Highest Yoga Tantra. To despise a woman is a transgression of one of the root tantric vows, although no corresponding transgression is mentioned in relation to male practitioners. Also, in the actual practice of meditating on mandala deities, the deity concerned is often female, such as Vajra Yogini or Nairatmaya.

In addition, tantra speaks of the point in the completion stage when the practitioner is advised to seek a consort, as an impetus for further realization of the path. In such cases of union, if the realization of one of the partners is more advanced, he or she is able to bring about the release, or actualization of the resultant state, of both practitioners.

Therefore, it is explained in Highest Yoga Tantra, that a practitioner can become totally enlightened in this lifetime as a female. This is explicitly and clearly stated in tantras such as Guhyasamaja.



The basic point is that in tantra and particularly in Highest Yoga Tantra, what practitioners are engaged in is a method of exploring and developing the latent potency within themselves. That is, the fundamental innate mind of clear light and from the point of view, since males and females possess that faculty equally, there is no difference whatsoever in their ability to attain the resultant state.

So, the Buddhist position on the question of discrimination between the sexes is that from the ultimate point of view, that of Highest Yoga Tantra, there is no distinction at all.

### **The Actual Paths of Tantric Practice - Action Tantra**

In the lower classes of tantra, two levels of the path are referred to, technically called yoga with signs and yoga without signs.

From another point of view, Action Tantra presents its paths in terms of methods to actualize the body of the Buddha, the speech of the Buddha and the mind of the resultant Buddhahood. The path for actualizing the body of the Buddha is explained in terms of visualization of the deity. The path for actualizing the speech is explained in terms of two types of mantra repetition - one actually whispered and the other repeated mentally. The path for actualizing the mind of the Buddha is explained in terms of what is technically called 'the concentration which bestows liberation at the end of sound'. This type of concentration requires as a prerequisite the concentration abiding in fire and the concentration abiding in sound.

### **Actualizing the Body of the Buddha**

Whether or not Action Tantra incorporates a practice of generating oneself into the deity is a point on which masters have differing opinions. However, we can say that ordinary trainees of Action Tantra

have no need to generate themselves into the deity. Their meditation is confined simply to visualizing the deity in their presence. But the principal trainees of Action Tantra are those who can actually generate themselves into deities and who visualize deities on such a basis.

## Deity Yoga



Visualization of a deity such as Avalokiteshvara, or deity yoga, as it is explained in an Action Tantra and intended for the principal trainees of that tantra, can be described in six stages: the emptiness deity, mantra deity, letter deity, form deity, mudra deity, and sign deity.

Meditation on the emptiness deity refers to meditation on the emptiness of your own self and the self of the deity - reflecting on their common basis in terms of their empty nature.

Generally speaking, as Aryadeva's *400 Verses* explains, from the point of view of their ultimate nature, there is no difference whatsoever between phenomena - they are all similar in that they lack inherent existence. From the ultimate point of view, they are of one taste, therefore it speaks of a multiplicity becoming of one taste. And though they all have identical empty natures, on the conventional level, phenomena have many different appearances, therefore it speaks of multiplicity from unity.



With meditation on the mantra deity, you visualize a resonant mantra arising from this state of emptiness, the ultimate nature of your own self and that of the deity. This is not in the form of letters, just the sound of the deity's mantra resounding. Maintaining that contemplation is the second step,

meditation on the mantra or sound deity.

During meditation on the letter deity the practitioner imagines the syllables of the self-resounding mantra emerging in the shape of letters standing on a white moon disc, within him or herself.

Next, the practitioner visualizes the letters of the mantra being generated into the actual form of the deity, which is meditation on the form deity.

Meditation on the mudra deity occurs when the practitioner, having arisen in the form deity, performs the specific hand gesture, which in the case of the Lotus family is performed at the heart.

Finally, meditation on the sign or symbol deity refers to visualizing the crown of your head, throat and heart being marked respectively by the three syllables OM AH HUM and inviting the wisdom beings to enter into your body.

### **The Importance of Realizing Emptiness**

One basic feature of all Buddhist tantric practices is that you should always meditate on emptiness before generating yourself into a deity, whether the manual you are using includes such Sanskrit words as Om svabhava-shuddha sarva-dharma... or not. The significance of this meditation is to emphasize the importance of generating your own wisdom realizing emptiness into the appearance of the deity. Although at the initial stage this is only done on imaginary level, it serves as a rehearsal for the occasion when the practitioner's awareness of the wisdom realizing emptiness actually arises in form of a divine body. For this reason, if the practitioner lacks an understanding of emptiness as explained either by the Yogic Practitioner or Middle Way schools, it is difficult to practise tantric yoga.

The appearance or form of the deity, generated from your own wisdom realizing emptiness, is said here to represent the practice of method. Then the practitioner has occasionally to reaffirm his mindfulness of the empty nature of the deity. This is the meditation on what is called the 'great seal ripening the faculties to actualize the form body', in the context of Action Tantra.

It is good if practitioners already possess the faculty of one-pointedness, or a calmly abiding mind. Otherwise, if you are cultivating single-pointedness in conjunction with tantric practice, you should do the practice after having generated yourself into the deity, but before doing the mantra repetition.

Many tantric manuals say that if you feel tired of the meditation then perform the mantra repetition. So, when those who do not perform intensive meditations at this point feel tired of repeating mantras, they will only be able to end their session. The actual structure of the ritual texts emphasizes meditation first of all and treats mantra repetition as secondary.

Meditation here refers to training in the profound and vast paths. Training in the profound path refers to meditation on emptiness, not meditation on any emptiness, but rather an emptiness which is the

unique nature of the deity you have visualized. Focusing upon the empty nature of such a deity constitutes this practice.

Meditation on the vast path consists of two aspects firstly, trying to develop a very clear visualization of the deity, for once this appearance of yourself as the deity is firm and clear, you will be able to develop the second aspect, which is divine pride. Once you have a clear vision of yourself as a deity, you will be able to develop a very strong sense of divine pride, of actually being the deity.

In one of the Indian master Buddhajñana's meditation manuals, the question is raised, that although ignorance is the root cause of cyclic existence, in the deity yoga of the generation stage, there is no specific meditation on emptiness. How then can one maintain that deity yoga serves an opponent force to this ignorance? In reply, Buddhajñana says that what is meant by deity yoga in the generation stage of tantra is a practice in which you meditate on the empty nature of the form of the deity, not meditation on the deity alone. You meditate upon the emptiness of the deity while retaining its visualized appearance. So, the practice of deity yoga consists of two aspects: that focused on conventional truth and that focused on ultimate truth.

The tantras also refer to three attitudes: regarding all appearances in the form of deities, everything you hear in the form of mantra and any conscious experience you have as the wisdom of the deity.

The first attitude should be understood in the sense not of developing such a perception through conviction, but to achieve a very particular purpose, that is to overcome our sense of ordinariness. On an imaginary level you try to perceive everything that appears to you in the form of the deity. Therefore, the apprehension of that attitude is always founded on emptiness.

Another explanation of this attitude, particularly as presented in the Sakyapa tradition, discusses the meaning of the three-fold tantra. Their teaching known as Path and Fruit describes 'causal tantra' as the fundamental ground and the practitioner is trained to understand the significance and meaning of this fundamental ground in order to attain a perception of everything as pure and divine.



Another explanation found in the works of one of the masters of the Great Perfection School, Dodrup



Jigme Tenpai Nyima, called *General Topics of the Essence of Secrets*, explains that the cultivation of this perception from the point of view that everything that occurs within this cycle of existence and peace is in fact a different manifestation or play of the fundamental ground known as primordial awareness in the terminology of the Great Perfection. This primordial awareness is the source of everything that occurs and appears in the expanse of reality - cyclic existence and peace are just manifestations of primordial awareness, which is in fact the subtlest level of clear light.



This resembles the Middle Way explanation that emptiness is the source or the origin of all conventional phenomena, because all phenomena are manifestations of the same ultimate nature, emptiness. Similarly, the Sakya and Nyingma explanations that all phenomena appearing within the cycle of existence and peace are manifestations or the play of primordial awareness, have the same kind of intention.

This primordial awareness, the subtle clear light, is permanent in terms of its continuity and its essential nature, unpolluted by disturbing emotions, is basically pure and clear. From that point of view it is possible to extend your vision of purity to include all phenomena, which are actually manifestations of this fundamental ground.

We should remember that these different explanations are given from the point of view of Highest Yoga Tantra.

So, that is the point at which you have to undertake the meditation. If, after having done so, you feel tired, you can do the mantra repetition.

### **Actualizing the Speech of the Buddha**

Action Tantra speaks of two types of mantra repetition: one is whispered, which means you recite quietly so you can hear yourself, and the other is mental repetition, which means you do not voice but imagine the sound of the mantra.

### **Actualizing the Mind of the Resultant Buddha**

The concentration abiding in fire is a term given to the meditation in which the practitioner visualizes different mantras, seed syllables and so on, at the heart of the meditational deity and imagines flames arising from them.

The concentration abiding in the sound refers to a meditation in which the practitioner imagines and concentrates on the tone of the mantra not as if he or she were reciting it themselves, but rather listening to the tone of mantra as though it were recited by someone else.

So, the practitioner cultivates single-pointedness or a calmly abiding mind in these ways, which is why we find passages in the Action Tantras which say that through the practice of concentration abiding in fire, the practitioner will gain physical and mental suppleness. Then, through the concentration abiding in the sound, the practitioner will actually attain a calmly abiding mind.

The third type of yoga, called bestowing liberation at the end of the sound, is a technique which provides the practitioner with eventual realization of liberation.

Generally speaking, if we were to classify the tantric teachings among the three scriptural collections of discipline, discourses and knowledge, the tantric teachings would be included amongst the second, the sets of discourses. Therefore, in the tantras, Buddha himself has said that he would teach tantra in the style of the sutras.

The significance of this is that the unique or profound features of tantra come about through techniques for cultivating meditative stabilization. The unique feature, common to all four tantras, that distinguishes tantric practice from practices of the sutras is the tantras' special technique for cultivating meditative stabilization.

One thing I would like to clarify here is that, generally speaking, calm abiding is an absorptive state of mind in which a person is able to maintain his or her attention to a chosen object undistractedly. Therefore, techniques for cultivating such a state are also absorptive rather than contemplative.

Special insight is an analytical type of meditation, so the methods for cultivating special insight are also analytical in nature.

Calm abiding is a heightened state of mind in which not only is your concentration single-pointed, but it is also accompanied by faculties of mental and physical suppleness. Similarly, special insight is a heightened state of mind in which your analytical power is so developed that it is also equipped with mental and physical suppleness.

So, because meditation on calm abiding is absorptive in nature and meditation on special insight is analytical, when we speak about meditation in general, we must be aware that there are many different types. Certain types of meditation are states of mind which focus on an object, such as meditation on emptiness, in which emptiness is the object, whereas in meditation on love, you generate your mind into

a state of love. In addition, there are different types of meditation in which the focus is on imagining or visualizing something.

According to explanations in the sutras and the three lower tantras, when you cultivate calm abiding in a meditative session, you are thoroughly absorbed, maintaining single-pointedness and not employing any analysis. The two different types of meditation are usually distinct from one another, but Highest Yoga Tantra contains a unique method of penetrating the vital points of the body. It is by pin-pointing these sensitive points of the body that even special insight can be cultivated through concentrated or absorptive meditation.

In the practice of the sutra path and three lower tantras, attainment of calm abiding and special insight are always sequential. Calm abiding is attained first, leading on to special insight, whereas in Highest Yoga Tantra, some of the most able practitioners can attain the two simultaneously.

The third type of yoga referred to earlier, the concentration bestowing liberation at the end of the sound, is a technical term given to the meditation on emptiness according to the tantric system. It is also known as the yoga without signs, while the two earlier concentrations are referred to as the yoga with signs.

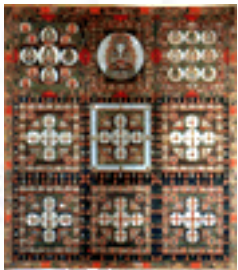
## **Performance Tantra**

Mandalas belonging to Performance Tantra are quite rare in the Tibetan tradition, but when they do occur the most common deity is Vairochana Abhisambodhi.

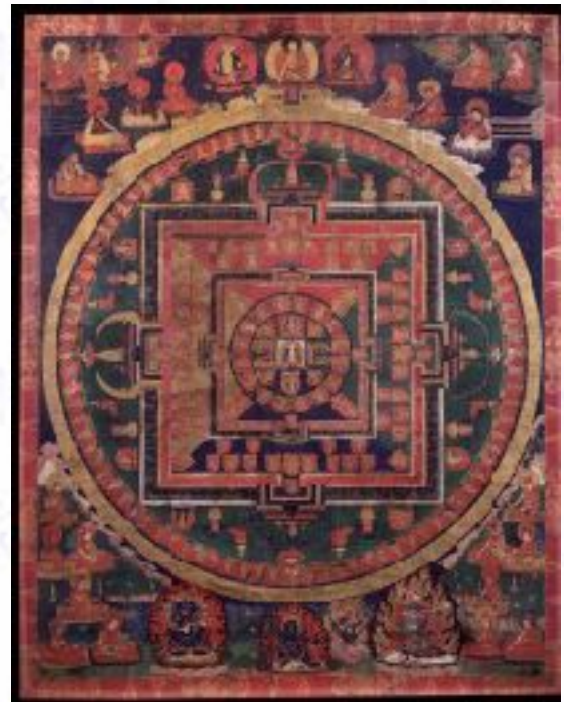
Performance Tantra also presents the paths in terms of the yoga with signs and yoga without signs. Here, yoga without signs refers to meditation, the emphasis of which is on emptiness, while the emphasis of the yoga with signs is not.

Both Action and Performance Tantra speak of the requirement to practise deity yoga and undertake the appropriate meditation retreat, which is followed by engaging in the activities of the practice. In the Action and Performance Tantras this refers mainly to certain types of activities such as the prolongation of life on the basis of a long-life deity. Other types of activity, such as achieving the highest liberation and so on, are not described in detail.

## **Yoga Tantra**

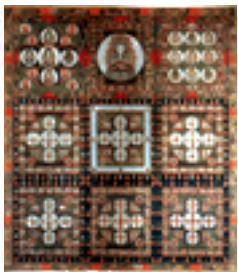


The most important tantra of this class translated into Tibetan is the *Compendium of the Principles of All the Tathagatas* (Sarva-tathagata-tattva-samgraha), which concerns the Vajra Realm and includes the Sarvavid tantras.



The general procedure of the path of Yoga Tantra is explained on the basis of three factors: the basis of purification, the purifying path and the purified result. The basis purification here refers to the practitioner's body, speech, mind and activity, while the purifying paths refer to the practice of the great seal, the phenomena seal, the pledge seal, and the wisdom or action seal. Just as there are four bases of purification, there are four purified results: the body, speech, mind and activities of Buddhahood. This is why the principal text of this class of tantra, the *Compendium of the Principles*, has four sections.

## Highest Yoga Tantra



Highest Yoga Tantra for us Tibetans is like our daily diet. I have found that the practice of the *Compendium of the Principles*, and the Vairochana-abhisambodhi tantra is widespread in Japan, where there are quite a lot of practitioners of the lower tantras. But it seems that Highest Yoga Tantra is found only in the Tibetan tradition, although I cannot state this definitively.

The trainees for whom Highest Yoga Tantra was intended are human beings belonging to the desire realm, whose physical structure is comprised of six constituents. These refer to the three constituents we obtain from our father and the three we obtain from our mother.

One unique feature of the profound paths of Highest Yoga Tantra is that they employ techniques which correspond not only to phenomena related to the basis of purification as they occur on the ordinary level, such as death, intermediate state and rebirth, but also to features of the resultant state of Buddhahood, the three bodies of the Buddha.

Highest Yoga Tantra explains the term tantra on three levels, causal tantra, which is the basis, method

tantra which is the path and resultant tantra. All three levels of tantra arise from the fundamental innate mind of clear light.

If you understand the significance of this, you will understand the explanation of the Sakya tradition which speaks of a causal tantra called the basis of all, or the fundamental basis, referring to the mandala and the deities within it, all of which actually arise from this fundamental basis.



This tradition explains that the fundamental basis is present in our basic faculties and all phenomena on an ordinary level in the form of characteristics. All the phenomena on the path are present within this fundamental basis in the form of qualities, and all the phenomena of resultant state of Buddhahood are present within this fundamental basis in the form of potential. Similarly, we find statements such as 'the equality of the basis and the result' in the writings of the Nyingmapa.

Since all the phenomena of the resultant state are complete or present in this fundamental basis in the form of potential, we can also understand such statements as the body of the Buddha and his wisdom being inseparable. But it is also important to understand these statements and concepts correctly, otherwise there is a danger of mistakenly asserting something like the Enumerator's (Samkhya) view that the sprout is present at the time of its seed.



Keeping the ultimate intent of such points in mind, we can understand that what Maitreya wrote in his *Sublime Continuum*, 'all the stains of the mind are temporary and adventitious, all the qualities of the mind are present within it naturally' doesn't mean that all the qualities and realizations of the mind are actually present within the mind, but exist in the form of potential in the fundamental innate mind clear light. From this point of view we can also understand such statements as, 'recognizing one's true nature is equivalent to becoming totally enlightened'.

There are similar passages in other tantras such as Hevajra tantra where we read, 'sentient beings are completely enlightened, but they are obscured by mental stains'. The Kalachakra tantra also speaks very emphatically on this point, the fundamental innate mind of clear light, but it employs different terminology, giving it the name 'all pervasive vajra space'.





In his commentary on the fivefold completion stage of Guhyasamaja tantra, *Lamp Illuminating the Five Stages*, Nagarjuna mentions that the practitioner abiding in an illusory meditation perceives all phenomena in the same aspect. The implication here is that at the completion stage, when the practitioner is able to arise in a very subtle body, technically known as illusory body, which is of the nature of the very subtlest energy and mind, he extends his perception to all phenomena, perceiving them as manifestations of this fundamental mind of clear light.

Now, although we may be able to understand perceiving all living beings as manifestations of the fundamental innate mind of clear light, because ultimately this is the fundamental source from which they all arose, the question is, how logically do we justify the whole environment being a manifestation of this fundamental innate mind of clear light? I don't think the reference here is to the environment or phenomena being of the nature of the mind, although the Mind Only School of Buddhist thought maintains that that is the nature of all external reality. Here the meaning is slightly different. We should understand the whole environment, all external phenomena, as creations, manifestations or appearances of this fundamental innate mind of clear light, rather than being of the nature of it.

So, when a person goes through the manifest experience of this fundamental innate mind of clear light, which is the subtlest level of the mind, at that point all the gross levels of energy and mental processes are withdrawn or dissolved. What then appears to the mind at such a level is only pure emptiness.

In tantra, techniques and methods are explained by which a person is able to utilize the fundamental innate mind of clear light that naturally manifests at the time of death or other occasions. Generally, in the sutra system, the last moment of a dying consciousness is said to be neutral though very subtle, but methods are explained in tantra to put that state of mind to positive use, by generating it into something virtuous.

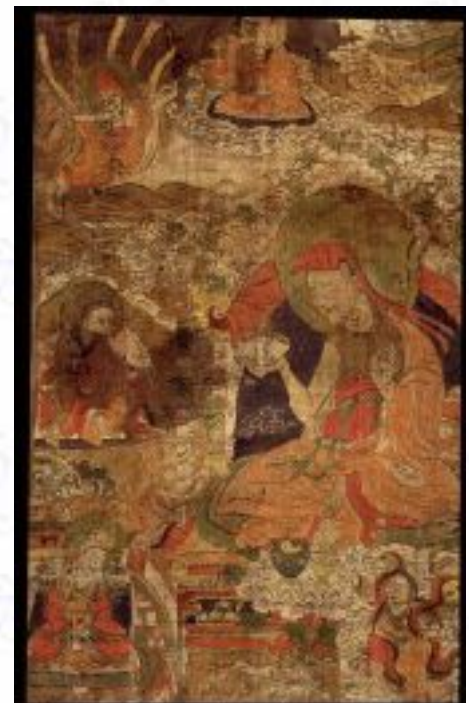
I have read in the works of the Indian master Vasubhandu that, compared to negative states of mind, virtuous states are more powerful. The reason being, from one point of view, that virtuous states of mind have a valid basis because they are rational and unmistakable. Another reason is that it is only virtuous states of mind that can be generated at moments of generating the fundamental innate mind of clear light, such as the time of death, and even extended beyond it. Negative states of mind could never be generated once the fundamental innate mind of clear light has become manifest.



The view of the Great Seal, the Mahamudra of the Kagyu tradition, and the view of the Great Perfection, Dzogchen, all come down to the same point - understanding the fundamental innate mind of clear light. You might want to question that, because normally the Great Perfection is presented as the peak of the nine vehicles for the reason that in practising it we utilize our basic awareness, while in the preceding vehicles, we used our minds. If that is the case, how can we say that the view of the Great Perfection comes to the same thing, that is an understanding of the fundamental innate mind of clear light, which is also referred to in Highest Yoga Tantra?

The answer to this question has been given by the Dzogchen master Tenpai Nyima. He says that, while it is true that in Highest Yoga Tantra much emphasis is given to exploring and developing the fundamental innate mind of clear light, this is also a feature of Great Perfection practice. The difference lies in their methods.

In Highest Yoga Tantra practices, techniques for exploring and developing the fundamental innate mind of clear light are explained as a very gradual process leading from the generation stage on to the subsequent stages of completion, and eventually to actualization of the clear light. In the practice of Great Perfection the development and enhancement of the fundamental innate mind of clear light has been explained, not as a gradual process, but as directly grasping the mind of clear light itself, right from the beginning, by using our basic awareness.



When studying Highest Yoga Tantra, we must keep in mind that in tantric treatises, a single word can have many different levels of interpretation, just as in the case of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras that we discussed earlier, which had two levels of interpretation, a literal meaning and a hidden meaning. In the tantric case, the interpretation is much deeper, one word can have many different levels of meaning and interpretation.



It is said that one word of the tantra can have four interpretations, four modes of explanation: the literal meaning; the explanation common to the sutra system and the lower tantras; the hidden or concealed meaning which is of three types:- that which conceals the method for taking desire into the path, that which conceals appearance, and that which conceals conventional truth - the illusory body; and finally, the ultimate meaning.

There is also a mode of interpretation called the six boundaries: the interpretive and definitive, the intentional and non-intentional, the literal and non-literal meaning.

In this complex approach to tantra, there are two ways of actually explaining it to the disciples. One refers to the presentation given at a public teaching or gathering and the other refers to the manner of the teacher-disciple relationship.

In order to validate the practice of tantra as a Buddhist practice that will eventually lead to the achievement of Buddhahood, reference is always made in tantric treatises to the mode of procedure on the sutra path. The complexity and subtle differences in the various tantras are due to the differences in the practitioners' mental disposition, physical structure and so on. Therefore, tantras begin with a preface in which the qualifications of the appropriate trainees are identified. There are four types of practitioners of tantra, the chief being called the jewel-like practitioners.

The practitioner of explaining the tantras to an appropriate trainee in such a complex way is to enable the trainee to realize the two truths. The two truths here do not refer to the two truths explained in the sutra system, which are ultimate and conventional truths. These are the two truths in the context of Highest Yoga Tantra.

According to the sutra explanation, both ultimate and conventional truths in the context of the Highest Yoga Tantra would both be conventional truths. This mode of interpreting a tantric treatise is explained in a tantra called *Compendium of Wisdom Vajras*, which is an explanatory tantra.



One feature of tantra is that almost all the tantras began with two words *E wam*. These two letters encompass the entire meaning of tantra, not only the literal, but also the definitive meaning of tantras. All tantras, because they are treatises, are composed of many different letters, which ultimately are all derived from vowels and consonants, therefore all of them are contained in these two letters *E wam* and since the entire meaning of tantra is encompassed in the three factors, base, path and result, all of them are also included in the meaning of *E wam*.

*E wam* actually encompasses the entire subject matter of tantra, as Chandrakirti explained when he summarized the whole content of tantra in one verse in his renowned commentary the *Brilliant Lamp*. It was so famous that at one time it was said that just as the sun and the moon are the two sources of light in the sky, on the earth there are two sources of clarity, referring to *Clear Words*, which is Chandrakirti's commentary to Nagarjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way* and his *Brilliant Lamp*, which is his extensive commentary to the Guhyasamaja Tantra.



The verse says,

The generation stage actualizing the deity's body is first,  
Meditation on the nature of the mind is second,  
Attaining a stable conventional truth is third,  
Purification of conventional truth is fourth,  
Conjoining the two truths in union is fifth.

In essence this is the entire subject matter of Highest Yoga Tantra. Chandrakirti's treatise divides the

entire tantric path into five stages; the generation stage and the four stages of completion stage.

Just as there are different stages on the path, so there are different initiations which are ripening factors for these paths. The initiation that empowers the practitioner to undertake the generation stage is called the vase initiation. The factor that empowers the practitioner to undertake the practice of the illusory body, which includes the three isolations; isolated body, isolated speech and isolated mind that are actually preliminaries to the illusory body and make up the three first stage of the completion stage, is the second or secret initiation. With the wisdom knowledge initiation, the practitioner is empowered to undertake meditation on clear light. And with the fourth initiation, the practitioner is empowered to undertake meditation on union.

## Bliss and Emptiness



There are two different connotations of the term 'union'. One is the union of emptiness and bliss and the other is the union of conventional and ultimate truths. When we speak of union in the sense of conventional and ultimate truth, the union of emptiness and bliss is one part of the pair and the illusory body is the other. When these two are united or inseparably conjoined, they form the union the two truths.

One meaning of the union of emptiness and bliss, is that the wisdom realizing emptiness is conjoined with bliss - the wisdom realizing emptiness is generated in the aspect of bliss, such that they are one entity. Another interpretation of joining bliss and emptiness is that you utilize a blissful state of mind to realize emptiness and such a realization of emptiness through that blissful state of mind is called the union of bliss and emptiness.

As to the sequence for attaining bliss and the realization of emptiness there are two modes. In some cases, experience of a blissful state of mind come first, followed by the realization of emptiness. However, for most practitioners of the Highest Yoga Tantra, realization of emptiness precedes the actual experience of bliss.

Certain practitioners' realization of emptiness may not be as complete as that of the Middle Way Consequentialist school. They may adhere to a view of emptiness as propounded by the Yogic

Practitioner or Middle Way Autonomist schools, but by applying certain tantric meditative techniques, such as ignition of the inner heat, or penetrating the vital points of the body through wind yoga, you may be able to generate an experience of bliss. This may eventually lead to a state where you are able to withdraw or dissolve the gross level of mind or energies.

Such a deep level of experience, when conjoined with a little understanding of emptiness, may lead to a subtler understanding of emptiness, an understanding that all phenomena are mere mental imputations, mere designations, imputed to the basis, lacking inherent existence and so on. For that type of person bliss is attained earlier and the realization of emptiness later.

The practitioner with sharp faculties, who is the main trainee of Highest Yoga Tantra, should be equipped with a realization of emptiness before taking a Highest Yoga Tantra initiation. For such a practitioner, therefore, the wisdom realizing emptiness is attained earlier than experience of bliss.

During an actual tantric meditation session a practitioner with sharp high faculties uses methods such as ignition of the inner heat, or deity yoga, or penetrating vital points of the body through wind yoga and so on. Through the force of desire which he has generated, he is able to melt the mind of enlightenment or elements within his body and experiences a state of great bliss. At this point the experience is the same whether the practitioner is male or female. He or she recollects the realization of emptiness and conjoins it with the experience of great bliss.

The way great bliss is experienced is that when the mind of enlightenment or elements within the body are melted, you experience a physical sensation within the central channel which gives rise to a very powerful experience of bliss. This in turn induces a subtle mental bliss. When the meditator then recollects his or her understanding of emptiness, the experience of mental bliss is conjoined with it. That is the conjunction of bliss and emptiness.



According to the tantric explanation, when we speak of a blissful experience here, we are referring to the bliss that is derived from the emission of the element of regenerative fluid, another type of bliss which is derived from the movement of that element within the channels, and a third type of bliss which is derived through the state of immutable bliss. In tantric practice it is the two latter types of bliss that are utilized for realizing emptiness.

Because of the great significance of utilizing bliss in the realization of emptiness we find that many of the meditational deities in Highest Yoga Tantra are in union with a consort. As I explained before, this experience of bliss is very different from the ordinary bliss of sexual experience.

### **Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth**

Since the practice of Highest Yoga Tantra is intended to benefit the trainee or practitioner whose physical structure possess the six constituents, the processes of the path resemble ordinary experiences of death, intermediate state and rebirth.

Because of human beings' unique physical structure, they naturally pass through three stages: death, intermediate state and rebirth. Death is a state when all the gross levels of mind and energy are withdrawn or dissolved into their subtlest levels. It is at that point that we experience the clear light of death. After that we assume a subtle body known as the intermediate state and when the intermediate state being assumes a coarser body, visible to other persons, it has taken rebirth into a new life.



Although we naturally pass through these different states, in their tantric treatises, Nagarjuna and Aryadeva have described unique techniques and methods whereby practitioners can put these experiences to positive use. Rather than go through them helplessly, can gain control of these three states and use them to achieve the resultant state of Buddhahood.



The procedures for achieving the three bodies of the Buddha, the Truth Body, Enjoyment Body and Emanation Body, have features similar to the states of death, intermediate state and rebirth. Thus, there is a possibility of achieving the three bodies by utilizing these three states.

As the path of Highest Yoga Tantra is explained in terms of meditation on the three bodies of the Buddha, any generation stage practice in Highest Yoga Tantra should incorporate these three aspects.



The Nyingma texts describe this process in different terms, referring to the three meditative stabilizations instead of the meditation on the three bodies, the meditative stabilizations of suchness, the meditative stabilizations of arising appearances and the causal meditative stabilization. These meditative stabilizations are equivalent to those generation stage practices explained in both Yoga Tantra and Highest Yoga Tantra, comprising the meditative stabilization of the initial stage, the victorious mandala meditative stabilization and the victorious activities meditative stabilization.

Meditation on the three bodies refers to the meditation in which you take death, intermediate state and rebirth into the process of the path. For instance, taking death into the process of the path as the Truth Body is where you transform the condition of dying by imagining or visualizing going through the process of death. On the imaginary level you withdraw and dissolve all the processes of your mind and energies. The death process begins with a dissolution of elements within your own body, consequently it has eight stages starting with the dissolution of the earth, water, fire, and wind elements.

This is followed by four stages, technically referred to as the experiences of white appearance, red increase, black near attainment and the clear light of the death. This dissolution is experienced during the generation stage only on an imaginary level, while deeper experiences of the dissolution process arise as the practitioner progresses and advances in his realization during the completion stage. This will eventually lead to a point where he will be able to go through the experience of the actual death process.

Nowadays, scientists have been conducting experiments to examine the death process to find out how it works. The process of dissolution will be much clearer in a person going through the death process gradually, such as someone who has been sick for a long time, and more conclusive results may be achieved in this way.

A tantric practitioner who has attained an advanced state of realization will be able to recognize the experience of death for what it is and will be able to put it to positive use, maintaining his awareness and not simply being overwhelmed by it. Generally speaking, ordinary people may remain in the clear light of death for up to three days at most, but some meditators may abide in it for a week or more. What indicates that a person, although externally they may appear to be dead, has remained in the clear light of death, is that the body does not decompose.

The point at which the meditator goes through the experience of clear light on an imaginary level

during the generation stage, is the point at which he or she should enter into meditative equipoise on emptiness.

Just as an ordinary person enters into the intermediate state and assumes a very subtle body following the experience of the clear light of death, in the generation stage practice, after arising from this meditative equipoise on emptiness, the practitioner assumes a subtle body on an imaginary level, which is the factor that ripens the intermediate state. This is meditation on the Enjoyment Body.

Then, just as on ordinary level a person in the intermediate state assumes a gross physical body marking their rebirth into a new life, so a practitioner of the generation stage, following the adoption of an Enjoyment Body, assumes an Emanation Body.

There are many manuals describing meditations on the generation stage for generating yourself as a deity. In some practices you find yourself arising first as a causal vajra-holder and then as the resultant vajra-holder, in other cases, you find that you generate yourself into a deity through a process known as the 'five clarifications' and so forth.

Although there are a lot of ways to visualize yourself as a deity in the practices of the generation stage which are very important, the most significant part of the meditation is the point at which you give special emphasis to meditation on the vast and the profound by cultivating the clarity of the visualization and divine pride. I have already mentioned this when I explained that the practitioner should cultivate clarity in the visualization of the deity and divine pride based on that.

As a serious practitioner you should try to undertake all these meditations, always relating them to your own mental state and level of realization, and always watching that your own meditation is free from the influences of mental laxity and excitement. Such forms of meditation should be undertaken in a sustained and concerted manner.

The greatest obstacle to obtaining and maintaining single-pointedness of mind is mental distraction. This includes many different types of mental states, such as mental scattering, but amongst them all the greatest obstacle is mental excitement. This arises when your mind is distracted by a desirable object. In order to overcome and counteract such influences, the meditator is recommended to try to relax the intensity of the meditation, to withdraw the attention from external objects and so on, so that the mind can be calmed down.

Because mental excitement comes about when your mind is too alert or your meditation is too intense, it helps to reflect on the nature of suffering of cyclic existence and so on. This will enable you to reduce the intensity of your alertness.

In order to develop firm single-pointedness of mind, it is necessary to have both clarity of mind and clarity of its object, for without clarity, even though you may be able to withdraw your mind from external objects, you will not be able to achieve single-pointedness. Clarity here is of two types, clarity

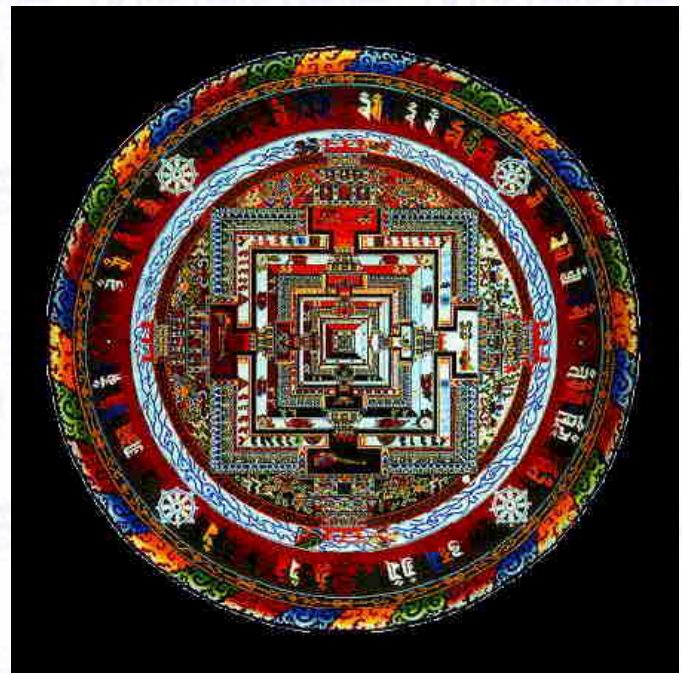
of vision and clarity of the subjective experience itself. The factor that disrupts clarity of mind is mental sinking. This can be overcome by raising your level of awareness.

When you engage in meditation to develop single-pointedness, you should judge for yourself whether your mind is too intensely alert or whether it is too relaxed and so on. Assessing the level of your own mind you should cultivate single-pointedness correctly.

Because the object of meditation in the practice of Highest Yoga Tantra is yourself in the form of a deity, and also because of the practice of single-pointedly focusing your attention on certain points within your body, you are able to bring about movement of the elements in the body. Some meditators have related their experiences of this to me. When you are able to hold a clear image of the deity single-pointedly for a long period of time, this obstructs your normal sense of ordinariness and so leads to a feeling of divine pride. However, during all these stages of meditation, it is very important constantly to reaffirm your awareness of emptiness.

When you undertake practice properly in this way you will reach a point where you will have a clear visualization of the entire mandala and the deities within it of such vividness that it is as if you could see them and touch them. This indicates realization of the first stage of generation.

If, as a result of your further meditation, you are able to reach the stage where you have a clear vision of the subtle deities that are generated from different parts of your body in a single instant, you will have achieved the second level of the generation stage.



Once you have attained firm meditative stabilization, different meditations, such as emanating deities, dissolving them back into your heart and so on, are explained in order to train yourself to gain further control over this single-pointedness. These meditations include visualization of subtle hand symbols at the opening of the upper end of the central channel and visualization of subtle drops and syllables at its lower end. Then, if you feel exhausted as a result of all this meditation, the next step is to do the mantra repetitions.



Mantra repetition in Highest Yoga Tantra is of many varieties, mantra repetition that is a commitment, mantra repetition that is gathered up like a heap, wrathful mantra repetition, and so on.

## **The Post-meditational Period**

Following this there are practices for the post-meditation period. Since a tantric practitioner has to lead a life in which he is never separated from his practice of union of method and wisdom, the post-meditation periods are very important. There are different yogas to be practised in these periods such as the yoga of sleeping, the yoga of eating, which includes the proper way of maintaining your diet, the yoga of washing and so on. There are even certain practices to be observed while relieving yourself.

Just as the great masters say, 'The progress made during the meditation session should complete and reinforce the practices during the post-meditation period, and the progress made in the period after your meditation session should reinforce and complement your practices during the session.'

It is during the post-meditation period that you can really judge whether your practice during the meditation sessions has been successful or not. If you find that despite having undertaken meditation for years, your way of thinking, your lifestyle and behaviour during the post-meditation period remain unchanged and unaffected, it is not a good sign.

We don't take medicine in order to try it or test it for taste, colour or size, but in order to improve our health. If after taking it for a long time, it has done us no good, there is no point in continuing to take it. Whether your practices are short or elaborate, they should bring about some transformation or change for the better.

## **The Completion Stage**

There are different kinds of activities that can be done on the basis of the deity yoga practised in the generation stage. Consistently engaging in such forms of practice, the meditator will reach a point where he or she will begin to feel the physical effect of these practices. Experiencing this special physical effect within your body marks the attainment of the first level of completion stage.

There are many different types of completion stage practice, such as the yoga of inner heat, wind yoga - that is yoga that makes use of the currents of energy - and the yoga of the four joys and so forth. Wind yoga includes such techniques as holding the vase breath or what is technically referred to as vajra repetition.

At that point a lay practitioner can seek the assistance of a consort. But if the practitioner is an ordained person holding monastic vows, the point has not yet been reached. In order to engage in such profound practices of the completion stage, the practitioner should first be aware of the structure of his or her own body. This means understanding the stationary channels, the flowing energies and the drops that reside in certain parts of the body.

When we speak of channels, we generally refer to three main ones - the central, right and left channels - and also the five channel wheels or energy centres. These three main channels branch and re-branch so that there are, according to the tantric texts, 72,000 channels in the body. Some sutras also mention 80,000 channels within the body.



Then, there are the flowing energies. These are of ten types, five major energies and the five minor ones. The drops refer to the white element and the red element. The Kalachakra tantra refers to four types of drops: the drop between the brows, which becomes manifest during the waking period; the drop at the throat, which becomes manifest during the dream state; the drop at the heart, which becomes manifest at the time of deep sleep; and the drop at the navel, which becomes manifest at the four stage (death).

In the Kalachakra we find very detailed explanations of these things. The entire structure of the practitioner's body with its channels, energies and the drops is called the internal Kalachakra, which is the basis of purification. The Kalachakra Tantra speaks of three types of Kalachakra or wheel of time, the outer, inner and the alternative Kalachakras.

Based on a proper knowledge of the physical structure of his or her body, when the meditator focuses on certain vital points and penetrates them, he or she is able to withdraw and dissolve the flow of the gross level of wind and mind. Eventually, the practitioner will be able to generate the subtlest level of clear light, the clear light of death, into an entity of the path which is the wisdom realizing emptiness. Gaining such a realization is like having found the key which provides access to many treasures.



Once you achieve that stage and you have the key, you can attain the complete enlightenment of Buddhahood through the path of Guhyasamaja, that is by actualizing the illusory body as explained in the Guhyasamaja, or through the path of Kalachakra which speaks of the achievement of empty form, or through the rainbow body as explained in the Mayajala Tantra, which is also explained in the Great Perfection practices.



When a meditator has gained a certain control over his mind during the waking state, he or she begins to utilize even the dream state in the practice of the path and certain techniques are described for doing this. These kinds of meditation are called 'mixings', mixing during the waking state, during the dream state and during death.

Highest Yoga Tantra explains that the best practitioner is someone who is able to attain complete enlightenment within his or her lifetime. Those with middling faculties are able to attain it during their future lives. For those practitioners who will become enlightened during the intermediate state or during their future lives, practices such as the transference of consciousness are explained. There is also another practice quite similar to the transference of consciousness, but with the difference that the consciousness is transferred into another being's body or corpse.





These techniques belong to what are called the Six Yogas of Naropa, which are techniques Naropa extracted from many different tantras. These are among the basic practices of the Kagyu tradition. There is also a Gelug practice of the Six Yogas of Naropa derived from Marpa's tradition. These meditations can also be found in the Sakya practices of Path and Fruit and in the Nyingma practice of the Heart's Drop.

We have been discussing the Highest Yoga Tantra procedures according to the new tradition. But the old tradition or old transmission school, the Nyingma, refers to the Great Perfection Vehicle, whose practices consist of the Mind Collection, the Centredness Collection and the Collection of Quintessential Instructions.



Although there are many works on these topics, it is very difficult to perceive the subtleties of these different practices. Among these three collections, the Collection of Quintessential Instructions is said to be the most profound. We can say that the practices of the first two Collections lay the foundations for the practice of 'breakthrough'.

The view of emptiness explained in the Mind and Centredness Collections must have some features that distinguish it from the view of emptiness expounded in the low vehicle, but it is difficult to explain this clearly in words. The practices of the Collection of Quintessential Instructions have two aims: actualization of the Truth Body and actualization of the Enjoyment Body. The paths by which you actualize these two bodies of the Buddha are the practice of 'breakthrough' and 'leap-over'.

Through understanding these elements of the Great Perfection School, you can understand what is meant by the Great Perfection of the base, the Great Perfection of the path and the Great Perfection of the resultant state. As I have remarked before, these are factors that can be understood only through experience and cannot be explained merely through words. However, you can appreciate the extent of their profundity and difficulty by reading Longchenpa's text on the Great Perfection practices called *Treasury of the Supreme Vehicle*, although the fundamental text as well as the commentary to it are very large and difficult to understand. He has also composed a text called the *Treasury of Reality*, which also outlines the practices of the Great Perfection.



You can only hope to gain a good understanding of the Great Perfection if you are able to explain the practices of the Great Perfection according to these two texts of Longchenpa. It is also important to study Kunkhyen Jigme Lingpa's text on the Great Perfection called the *Treasury of Virtue*, in the second volume of which you will find explanations of Great Perfection practices.

There are also very short and succinct texts composed by masters who have themselves had experience of the Great Perfection. I myself believe that these texts were composed by highly realized masters who have been able to extract the essence of all the elements of the Great Perfection and its practices and as a result have been able to recount their experiences in a very few words. However, I think it would be very difficult to try to understand the practice of the Great Perfection on the basis of these short texts.

For example, when Lord Buddha taught the Perfection of Wisdom sutras, the shortest one consisted of the single syllable 'Ah'. This sutra is said to encompass the entire meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras, but it would be either too simple or too difficult if we were to try to study the Perfection of Wisdom on the basis of that sutra. To say 'Ah' is very simple, but it doesn't mean we have understood the meaning of the sutra.

When we study the Middle Way philosophy in all its complexity, studying the different reasons through which we can arrive at the conclusion that all phenomena lack inherent existences, if we are to understand all the subtleties and implications of such a philosophical view, it is also necessary to understand the viewpoint of the lower schools of thought. The conclusion you then arrive at is very simple. Because things are interdependent, and rely on other causal factors, they lack an independent nature or inherent existence.

But if you were to approach the Middle Way Consequentialist view of emptiness right from the

beginning with that simple statement, 'Because things are interdependent or dependent arising, they are empty of inherent existence', you would not fully understand what it meant or implied. If, in a similar way, you were to read a short text composed by an experienced lama on the Great Perfection and were to conclude that the view of the Great Perfection was very simple, that would be a sign that you had not understood it properly. It would also be very ironic if the highest of the nine vehicles could also be said to be the simplest.

And with this I come to an end of my survey of all the Buddhist practices including the systems of both sutra and tantra undertaken in the Tibetan tradition.



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