

Appendix 1: Summary of Nine Vehicles in Short by Pema Khandro

The concept of 'yana' which means 'vehicle' refers to a way of getting from one point of understanding to another. A vehicle is that which has Buddhist philosophy and practices which will take us from one specific starting point to a particular goal.

Buddhism offers different vehicles and they have different qualities. For example, a bicycle can get us from point A to point B. For someone going to the corner store, a bicycle is a perfect vehicle. However if we are driving across the country, a car or train would be a more appropriate vehicle. Even though a car could work, it would be much slower than a plane. A plane could get us across country faster, but it is a more dangerous way of travelling, because it is fast and powerful.

The nine yantras are nine schools of thought amongst Buddhism. Depending on where you are and where you are going, the vehicles are all appropriate for different people at different stages with different goals. The Sutrayana path is like a bicycle, relatively easy to use and anyone could travel with it, but it takes a lot of time to go along distance. Similarly, Tibetan thought frames Sutrayana as a slower path, which takes three hundred thousand lifetimes to complete. The implication is that it takes too long. Meanwhile Vajrayana is considered a faster path, which takes only one or three lifetimes to reach spiritual awakening, but greater attention is required because it is fast and powerful like a plane.

Sometimes the nine yantras are spoken of sequentially, like a ladder that one climbs to reach the ultimate goal of the greatest enlightenment possible. The whole point of a ladder is to go somewhere higher. This is a useful model for spiritual development because we can see how someone develops cognitively in stages like climbing a ladder. At first they may be able to perceive things in a black and white way. Later they may have the capacity to understand shades of grey and allow ambiguity. Further on, they may have the capacity to entertain multiple perspectives at once. In the Nyingma tradition the nine yantras are a ladder that leads to Dzogchen as the ultimate view.

The particular manner in which I (Pema Khandro) teach the Yantras is two fold. Sometimes I find the ladder concept useful. At other times, I frame the yantras as particular vantage points through

which we can apprehend our world and access our sanity. In this case, we may at some times find qualities of a ‘lower’ vehicle more appropriate – even if we usually rely on a higher vehicle. For example, if we are addicted, the Sutrayana vehicles of renunciation are the appropriate method to engage. In this way, the yanas can represent the scope or range for apprehending reality as we can experience it in this moment, and engaging with that experience appropriately.

SutraYana – The Renunciate Vehicles

One & Two The Solitary Realizer & The Path of the Hearers

1. In English: the Path of Renunciation
2. In Sanskrit: the shravaka yana and the pratyekabuddha yana
3. In Tibetan: རང་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཐེག་པ་དང་ཉན་ཐོས་གྱི་ཐེག་པ་

Base: The path begins with an ordinary person and the knowledge of the two truths, that there is ultimate reality and conventional reality.

Path: The path consists of accumulation of positive karma in order to become enlightened through many lifetimes of effort. These efforts focus on the accumulation of positive karma. These accrues as credits known as ‘merit’ which are positive momentum towards good fortune and awakening. This path is known as the “two accumulations” which are the accumulation of merit and wisdom.

Fruit:

Solitary Realizer: The realization of emptiness or non-self.

The Path of the Hearers: The realization of emptiness of self and all others, the realization that everything is actually interdependently arising.

One becomes an “arhat” an enlightened being endowed with understanding. Arhats are not Buddhas. They are ordinary people who became enlightened.

Who is the Buddha: The Buddha is a special class of being unlike every one else. There is only one Buddha per aeon.

Core texts:

The three baskets (pitakas), sutras (buddhas teaching), vinaya (monastic rules and regulations), abhidharma (philosophical treatises).

Core teachings:

Non-self, the Five Skandhas, the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, dependent origination.

Conduct:

Conduct is governed by the five vows, the ten actions to avoid and follow and the “Vinaya” which is the monastic code of conduct.

View of Reality:

Every day reality and individuality is “samsara,” a cycle of suffering that one must escape to through extinguishment in of that world. Then one is said to be a Buddha. Samsara and nirvana are two separate realities.

Vehicle Three - The Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas

In English: the Great Vehicle

Also known as: Mahayana

In Sanskrit: the bodhisattva yana

In Tibetan: བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་ཐེག་པ

Base: The path focuses on understanding “emptiness,” which leads to the wish to benefit others. Essentially emptiness refers to the idea that oneself and all things do not have intrinsic reality or fixed qualities. Instead meaning and reality are made up of interdependent parts. A key realization that comes from this view is that self and other are not separate, therefore compassion arises. Furthermore, Mahayana emphasizes that not only is self empty, but so is everything. This underscores the notion that reality is dependently arising in networks of relationships with everything else.

Path: The path consists primarily of working for the benefit of others liberation. It also contains the cultivation of wisdom (prajna), meditation (dhyana) and moral conduct (sila), though generally meditation is minimized and contemplation of liturgical prayers is the practice. A major practice is the supplication of deities, with devotion and requests for blessings and aid.

Fruit: One realizes emptiness as compassion. One becomes subsumed by Compassion. One realizes a way of seeing that sees the emptiness and interdependence of all things. In colloquial terms, one becomes an “bodhisattva,” by having a stable enlightened intent (bodhichitta) and acting on the intention to liberate others.

Or in more literary terms, one becomes a ‘bodhisattva,’ a highly realized being, through going through ten stages of spiritual awakening. These are known as the ten bodhisattva grounds (bhumis) which are also referred to in phrases such as “first level bodhisattva.” These stages each have measures of realization, the stages are known as very joyous, free from defilements and eventually becoming “a cloud of doctrine.” The ultimate fruit of the bodhisattva path is being able to benefit others tremendously because one is freed of defilements oneself.

Who is the Buddha: The Buddha is a special class of being unlike every one else. But there are also Bodhisattvas, so one’s goal is to become a Bodhisattva. These are beings who do not seek to escape from samsara but instead remain “in” it, meaning they remain individual in a human body in order to help others. In Mahayana the Buddha is reconceived to be ever present through the concept of the three kayas. The Buddha did not die and become extinct at death. Instead after the historical Buddha passed away, he went on to teach in other dimensions and remains present as an active force. Plus the cosmology expands to focus on many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who exist as divine beings in the energy body, Sambhogakaya. One emphasizes particular divinities depending on one’s tradition one might focus on one in particular.

Core texts:

Prajnaparamita, also known as Heart Sutra; Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra, Guide to the Bodhisattvas Way of Life (Bodhicaryavatara), Madhyamaka

Core teachings:

Mahayana -Madhyamika. Emptiness, non-duality of samsara and nirvana, the two-truths of conventional reality (how things appear) and ultimate reality, how things are.

Conduct:

Conduct is governed by proper intentions. It is not enough to do right actions one must do them with the understanding of emptiness, the wish for others benefit and the proper attitude (outlined in the six paramitas). Mahayana is more inclusive and the literature includes women, lay people and non-celibate adepts.

Reality View:

Mahayana has two varying ideas. The first is the ideas of ordinary world as samsara, and therefore needing to be escaped. And it also has the idea of samsara and nirvana are non-dual. In the case of samsara and nirvana as non-dual, they are a matter of the perspective that one has. When one is dominated by self-grasping and forgets “emptiness,” that is conditioned existence

(samsara). When one is not separate from others and realizes that everything is empty that is the attainment of Nirvana.

The Outer Tantras – The Ascetic Vehicles

In English: Path of Purification or Asceticism

In Sanskrit: yana of kriya tantra, charya tantra and yoga tantra

In Tibetan: བྱ་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པ་དང་སྤྱོད་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པ་དང་རྣལ་འབྱོར་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པ་

Base: The path begins with the seed of Buddhahood which must be groomed and developed. However this seed is covered by karmic residue which must be purified. The entry point is initiation in a ritual empowerment.

Kriya tantra:

“Delighting in the Deity through ascetic practices and ritual purity.” (Dudjom Lingpa 151)

Ritual purification and pure behaviors. Conduct is oriented around avoiding impure actions and performing rituals. The Buddhas are divine beings who are like dieties that one supplicates for blessings, intervention, assistance and purification. This yana and Charya Tantra are similar to Hindu practices and Mahayana, in terms of the emphasis of supplication of deities, purification, avoiding impure actions.

Charya tantra aka Upaya Tantra:

This is similar to Kriya Tantra. However, a progression is illustrated in where the sacred is located. One sees oneself as the only child of the divine being, buddha, bodhisattva that one calls upon for help and guidance through ritual, prayers and supplications. One practices mantra repetition and meditative absorption.

Yoga tantra:

At this stage we begin to see traces of Vajrayana, Tibetan Buddhism. In Yoga Tantra, one sees the dieties, buddhas, bodhisattvas as friends who come to help on the path. One calls upon for help and guidance through ritual, prayers and supplications. The practices are calm abiding and insight meditation (Sanskrit: Shamatha and Vipassana; Tibetan: Zhine and Lhatong) as well as supplicating the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Fruit:

One ripens the seed within and becomes awakened into one of the Buddha families.

4. The Inner Tantras: Mahayoga

In English: Great Yoga

In Sanskrit: Mahayoga

In Tibetan: རྣལ་འབྱོར་ཆེན་པོའི་ཐེག་པ་

In New Translation Schools this is sometimes known as Father Tantras and Mother Tantras in the language of the Kagyu, Sakya and Gelukpa schools.

Base: The path begins with buddha-nature potential that needs to be ripened.

Path: The path consists of creation and completion practices which essentially involve visualizing oneself as transforming into a Buddha or merging with the mind of the Buddha or the Lama. The practice begins with initiation by a teacher in an “empowerment.”

Fruit:

One becomes a “Rigdzin” an awareness holder (Sanskrit: Vidhyadhara; Tibetan: rig ‘dzin). One realizes the inseparability of the ‘two truths,’ that conventional reality and ultimate reality are one. In other words, the world as we know it is actually intrinsically sacred, good and whole when perceived directly.

The fruit is the realization of divine pride where one coalesces with the meditation deity and identifies with it completely.

The fruit is direct perception of reality as it really is – in terms of the Vajra world – a world imbued with meaning. One sees everything through the lens of “pure view,” where one realizes oneself and everyone is a Buddha, that one is living the field of that Buddha. One sees the world the deity and mandala of Samantabhadra (Tibetan Kuntuzanpo), the primordial buddha. The stages of realization are further described as having power over one’s lifespan and realizing subsequent further stages which culminate in a manner parallel to the bodhisattva bhūmis, but are said to be superior.

Who is the Buddha: The ultimate reality underlying everything and manifesting in particular forms.

Core texts: Guhyagarbha (11th century) is the main text for the Nyingma lineage, however later formations did not manifest the Guhyagarbha themes literally. There are also Chakrasamvara and other tantras that correspond to this yana.

Core practices: Ritual prayers, Deity Yoga (also known as generation stage, Tib. bskyed-rim), in which one visualizes the descent of blessings, purification followed by merging with a Buddhist meditational deity. There is also communal meditation known as Tsok practice. This also focuses on visualization of seed syllables a sonic and visual meditation practice. Mahayoga also emphasizes Guru Yoga (aka Lama Naljor) and practices for dying, death and post death. In particular one visualizes the deities as being in union with their consort, a contemplation of the central symbol of Mahayoga – the union of wisdom and skillful means as embodied in the symbol of Buddhas in ecstatic union.

Conduct:

Conduct is governed by “samaya” the fourteen tantric vows which emphasize seeing one’s teacher and spiritual community as having buddha-nature. These vows emphasize loyalty to one’s teacher, harmony with one’s community, respect for other genders and avoiding denigrating other spiritual paths.

Reality View:

Samsara and nirvana are non-dual, it is a matter of perception. When one sees the world without realization of emptiness, then it is conditioned existence (samsara). When one has a perceptual shift and sees reality as it is, then the world is Nirvana. This is the attainment of pure view.

5. The Inner Tantras: Anu Yoga

In English: Inner Yoga

In Sanskrit: Anuyoga

In Tibetan: རྗེས་སུ་རྣམ་འགྲོལ་གྱི་ཐེག་པ་

Base: The path begins with the insight into the purity of all phenomena. It is described in terms of the mandala of Samantabhadra the primordial buddha – a sense in which one is internalizing the visualizations of Vajrayana.

Path: The path consists of somatic practices which entail the visualization of the subtle body. This is a kind of ‘body of mind’ that maps onto the physical biology. It is organized according to channels, winds and centers (These are called tsa, lung and thigle in Tibetan). Inner Yoga practices focus on directing and manipulating the subtle body in order to generate enlightened states. This is also known as completion stage meditation (Tib. rdzogs rim).

Fruit: The realization of great bliss and emptiness. The realization of spontaneous presence of pristine awareness. The perception of the entire world as bodhichitta – perfect, complete and equal. Embodied realization.

Who is the Buddha: The Buddhas are the qualities of all phenomena and especially our entire body is actual a buddhafield, made up of enlightened energies and enlightened beings.

Core texts: The core texts are described by Dudjom Rinpoche as the All Gathering Awareness and the Six Tantras which Clarify the Six Limits and Twelve Rare Tantra and so forth. However generally the Inner Yogas are passed through oral tradition. Only a bare sketch of the practices is described in Buddhist literature. These practices initially were taught as stand alone practices but come to be part of every Tibetan Buddhist school’s practice curriculum, even though they are generally kept secret and for more advanced stages of practice. Tibetan Yogis are known for specializing in these practices.

Core practices: Completion stage meditation and the six yogas of Naropa.

Conduct:

Conduct is the same as Mahayoga, it is governed by the fourteen vows, known as samaya.

Reality View:

The world is pure presence and awareness. Emptiness and appearances or Emptiness and luminosity are said to co-emerge.

6. The Inner Tantras: Ati Yoga, the Ninth Yana

In Sanskrit: yana of atiyoga

In Tibetan: རྒྱལ་ལྷ་རྣམ་འབྱོར་གྱི་ཐེག་པ་

Base: The path begins after the realization of both emptiness and compassion. Then it is possible to perceive that emptiness and compassion are non-dual aspects of the ground of reality which is also luminous presence, or primordial knowing, know as Yeshe (Tib. Ye shes). Therefore the base is spoken about in Dzogchen as having essence, nature and energy. It is empty essence, luminous nature and compassionate responsiveness as the energy. In terms of its empty essence, reality is seen to be pure by nature or primordially pure, (Tib. Ka dag). In terms of its luminous nature, it is said to have clarity of sheer perception. This perception is the mind which is able to recognize itself. This clarity is vivid, present and spontaneously manifest. In terms of its energy it is said to be like a crystal with the sun's rays shining out of it. The phenomenal world manifests from the creative play of luminosity expressing itself and responding to itself with a total responsiveness which can also be described as compassion.

Path: The path consists of the recognition of luminous presence itself as the nature of mind and reality. One applies simple, direct contemplative methods for his recognition to take place, be stabilized and sustained. The path is to recognize confusion for what it is and therefore to allow authentic presence to be disinhibited.

Fruit: The fruit is said to be awakening to reality as it is, authentic presence, which is self-liberated. No more remedies or processes are needed because upon seeing things as they are, then confusion no longer has a hold over one's mind. The fruit can also be described as the three kayas where one is totally integrated with reality as it is in all three dimensions of being, form, energy and space.

Who is the Buddha: Every person has a Buddha-nature exactly identical to the historical Buddha. The difference between the historical Buddha and ordinary beings is only that the historical Buddha manifested or actualized this Buddha-nature. Ordinary beings do not recognize it or when they do, they cannot remain in it, due to being mesmerized by delusions and illusions.

Core texts:

These depend upon one's lineage. In this school we study the texts known as Dzogchen Nyingthig. Generally, these emphasize the Longchen Nyingthig, the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse. However we also specialize in the more rare body, the Khandro Nyingthig, the

Dakini's Heart. Our philosophical studies proceed through the lens of Dzogchen Nyingthig in the works of Longchenpa.

Core teachings:

The ground of being as a ground below the ground of alaya vijnana. The implication is that the world as we know it is not regarded as karmically generated but instead Buddha-nature generated. Also what is unconscious is not only bad (karma), but there is a layer below that which is the ultimate good, our Buddha-nature goodness or natural wisdom.

Conduct:

Conduct is the same as the other vehicles in spirit, however the lifestyle is one that does not require celibacy or renunciation. Instead there is the attitude of embracing ordinary life as the domain of Buddha-nature goodness.

Reality View:

Samsara and nirvana as inseparable.

References

Dudjom. The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism: Its Fundamentals and History. Wisdom Publications.