

Dzogchen and the Nine Yanas

Any discussion of the nine vehicles begins with a discussion of the essence of the sugatas, which is the essence, or foundational buddha nature, of all beings. In dependence upon the essential nature we all possess, the nine vehicles arise. In dependence upon the foundational buddha nature, samsara and nirvana arise. When the fundamental nature is realized as it is, this is nirvana, a place which is beyond sorrow and suffering. When it is not realized, when one is basically unaware of one's own buddha nature, this is samsara, cyclic existence. So by not realizing one's own fundamental buddha nature, gradually the different cycles, or progressive stages in cyclic existence are created. The six classes of beings arise only from that lack of awareness. The nine vehicles have come into existence as well, to lead sentient beings back to a realization of their own nature, which is nirvana.

If we examine that foundational buddha nature, the essential nature of all living beings, we come to know that it is utterly open. It is a vibrant nothing: emptiness. Its quality is that it is naturally luminous. It is sheer luminosity, or clear light. When one realizes that it is open and radiantly clear, then with pure awareness one experiences its compassionate quality, which is all-pervasive. This is the quality of rigpa, pure awareness. In this way the three—openness, clarity, and compassion—are really one. Although they are expressed as three, they are just the one foundational buddha nature as it is. That being the state of buddha, that is buddha, which is why it's called the buddha nature. Samsara is a state of confusion or mistaken awareness. The mistake—which actually causes cyclic existence, the experience of being a sentient being rather than a buddha—occurs when we fail to recognize that nature. In that moment of lack of awareness we establish objective awareness, we create objects: external phenomena.

To partially illustrate the nature of the mind, the analogy of space is used. The mind is likened to space because space has no shape, no color, and no characteristic. It is free from any conditioning or characteristic at all. In this way the example of space provides a suitable analogy to illustrate the nature of the mind, but there are other aspects to the mind—its radiant clarity and unobstructed compassion—that space doesn't necessarily possess. If we don't have a clear realization or understanding of the nature of the mind, then we have some confusion. Even if there is only the slightest bit of confusion, in that confusion we establish objective appearances, and that is the failure to realize the true nature of the empty quality of mind. When we are unaware of the luminosity, the natural clarity of the mind, we do not see the expression of enlightened presence—kayas and primordial wisdom energies—specifically the five primordial wisdoms as they arise. When we are unaware of that as the inherent display of the empty nature, we establish the external universe and the sentient beings, the animate creatures within. When we fail to realize the unobstructed compassionate nature of mind, that leads to mind itself. In this way objective appearances arise, specifically sentient beings and mind. These three: objects (or appearances), (bodily) form, and mind are the confused interpretation of the nature of the mind, which is emptiness,

clarity, and compassion. This is how samsara arises from that which is in fact already liberated, which is the buddha nature. Because of confusion, lack of awareness, we establish samsara in the place of awareness of the nature of the mind as it is.

We can consider that sentient beings are those who have failed to recognize the threefold quality of their basic buddha nature, which is the foundational nature of the sugatas. Sentient beings are those who have entered a state of confusion, which is called samsara, cyclic existence. Kuntuzangpo (Samantabhadra), the primordial buddha, is the awareness of the nature of mind being utterly open and empty, and this is the dharmakaya. The dharmakaya aspect of the nature of the mind is inherently, naturally, luminously clear and radiant, and this quality is the sambhogakaya. That same essential nature is also all-pervasively, unobstructedly, unceasingly compassionate, and this quality is the nirmanakaya. So these three kayas are inherent in the state of Kuntuzangpo, the primordial buddha. This is nirvana, the state of perfect freedom, primordial freedom. If it is not recognized, realized, then rather than experiencing the three kayas one experiences the three realms of cyclic existence, which arise only from the lack of awareness of one's own nature. In fact there is much to be said about the innate primordial nature, but it is not the main subject this evening.

Basically, what you need to know as far as the nine vehicles are concerned is that...

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