

Three turnings

Traditionally taught as

First Turning = things exist as they seem including the mind but the 'self' does not exist (*anatman*). Presented mainly in the *Sutra of the Turning of the Wheel of Dharma* as the teaching on the Four Noble Truths (suffering, origin, cessation and path). The first two truths represent the **ground**, the fourth truth is the **path** and the third truth the **fruit**. In practice, we have the Three Higher Trainings - moral discipline, concentration and wisdom which give rise to the abandonment of negativity that is the cause of our suffering and continued rebirth in samsara = liberation.

Second Turning - here, the Buddha expanded the view from 'selflessness' to the wider notion of 'emptiness' = the **ground**. No phenomena, inner or outer have any basis for existing inherently. Mainly taught in the different *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* presenting the 5 paths and ten grounds. In practice, we take the Bodhisattva Vows and practice the Six Perfections (**path**) through which we develop conventional bodhichitta (compassion), based on the view of the non-separation of ourself and others and ultimate bodhichitta (wisdom) based on the true nature of reality - 'emptiness'. This view overcomes the danger of believing that things 'exist' inherently. The ultimate **fruit** of this way of practice is full and complete enlightenment.

Third Turning - based on a disciple asking the Buddha why sometimes he had said that things 'exist' and at other times that they 'didn't exist' - apparent contradictions. Led to sutras such as (among others) the *Samdhinirmochana Sutra* (*Unravelling the Thought*) expressing the Yogachara doctrine and the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra* explaining Buddha Nature and the *Lankavatara Sutra* (*Descent into Lanka*) combining these two principles. In terms of the **view**, this is applied as the understanding that, whilst things are empty they nevertheless appear. Whilst they appear, they are empty. This overcomes the danger of misinterpreting the first turning that might seem to say that things exist, and the second turning that things do not exist (nihilism).

The third turning also teaches that there is an aware character or luminosity alongside the emptiness nature. This union of clarity (emptiness) and awareness (luminosity) is what we call Buddha Nature. Buddha Nature is not expressed as a seed that will one day grow into the nature of a Buddha but is, in this very moment, that nature. However, as ordinary beings, that nature is obscured and the **path** is that which will allow the already existing nature to manifest fully. The **fruition** is, again, full and complete enlightenment. Classical text is the *Uttaratantrashastra (The Sublime Continuum)* as one of the five texts of Maitreya - written down by Asanga.

According to Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, the three turnings can be related to the following quote from the Prajñāparamita sutras^[1]:

“Mind is devoid of mind. The nature of mind is clear light.”

- "Mind" refers to the first turning where mind is spoken of as if it is inherently existent.
- "...is devoid of mind" refers to the intermediate turning and the teachings on emptiness.
- "The nature of mind is clear light" refers to the final turning and the teachings on buddha nature.

Sutra and tantra

Views and methods

3 Yanas - hinayana, mahayana, vajrayana or secret mantrayana

Hinayana root of samsara = attachment

Mahayana root of samsara = ignorance of ultimate reality

Vajrayana root of samsara = ordinary appearance and conception

9 Yanas

shravakayana, pratyekabuddhayana, (hinayana) and
paramitayana (mahayana) = sutra or causal vehicle

kriya-, charya- and yoga-tantra = three 'outer' tantras - mainly methods for
purification and preparation

maha-, anu- and ati-yoga = three 'inner' tantras - transformative methods

All these six are the resultant vehicle - aka path of skilful means

In Sarma (new translation) schools maha-, anu- and ati-yoga are subsumed
into the two divisions of Highest Yoga Tantra - generation and completion
stages. Mahayoga is akin to generation stage, anuyoga is akin to completion
stage practice with elaboration (eg six dharmas of Naropa), atiyoga, also
called dzogchen, is akin to vajrayana mahamudra or direct experience of the
nature of mind

Inference vs experience

Sutra (causal) path = inference, logic, reasoning - approaching nature of reality in a gradual manner using inference - developing inferential cognizers through logic and reasoning (listening and contemplation) that, through repeated familiarity (meditation) gradually transform into direct perceivers.

Takes three countless great aeons of accumulating merit and wisdom

Tantric (resultant) path = direct perception of non-duality of experience, devoid of 'self' and 'other', 'perceiver' and 'perceived', empty, yet appearing. Beyond any notions of 'existing' or 'not existing'.

Can be achieved through *elaborate* methods (path of means) = yidam practice, six dharmas of Naropa etc. or *unelaborated* methods = mahamudra and dzogchen.

In practice, elaborate first which leads to unelaborated.

Can be achieved in one short human life.

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Emptiness of self and emptiness of phenomena -

Ignorance: Mistaken dualistic view that sees not only the object but also the object's inherent existence

Fundamental ignorance - mistake empty nature of mind for a self and the luminous aspect as 'other' - leads to dualistic view - leads to attachment and aversion - leads to actions that create karma and ingrained, habitual and self-perpetuating delusion/ignorance. This is how we create our imperfect world of confusion, delusion and suffering.

Tantric Practice

Guru

Samaya

Guru - connection between buddha nature and the deity who is seen as being the guru

This mandala corresponds to our complex life, with all of its relationships to beings, and to the environment surrounding our notion of ourself in concentric circles of importance all around. We have already created this mandala, but without awareness. Recreating the process in visualization, we see how we did it in the first place, and how, as the natural process of the creative energy of mind, it is essentially pure already. *Reggie Ray*

Two stages - generation and completion

Ordinary Appearance and conception

Divine pride and clear appearance