



## INTRODUCTION TO THE BUDDHIST PATH

“One is one’s own master. Who else can be one’s master?  
S/he that is skillful and master her/himself will fulfill every purpose.” The Buddha

### THE THREE VEHICLES

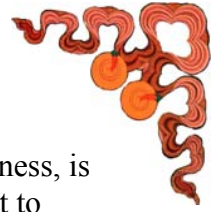
I would like to provide a brief explanation about the Buddhist Path. As you may know, in Buddhism, there exist two main yanas (vehicles): Hinayana and Mahayana. The second yana, Mahayana, is comprised of two levels of practice: Bodhisattvayana and Vajrayana (Tantra). These yanas (Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana) each include two foundations (two truths), two paths (wisdom and method), and two results (form body and truth body). Although all three yanas are comprised of the same core elements, how each yana defines these elements (the two foundations, two paths and two results) is distinct. The diverse nature of these elements in each of the yanas originates from the teachings given by Shakyamuni Buddha. Depending on each individual’s level and ability, they would receive the appropriate teachings.

From the Hinayana point of view the two truths are: *convention truth* and the *ultimate truth*. The convention truth would be *the self*; the ultimate truth is the *selflessness* of the self. Within Hinayana, the *method* means accumulating positive merit and *wisdom* involves the understanding of the selflessness of the self. In Hinayana the *form body* refers to the enlightened body and the *truth body* is the enlightened mind. According to this vehicle, the accumulation of positive merit purifies the self and results in the enlightened body, and the understanding of selflessness of the self leads to the realization of the enlightened mind. Furthermore, this principle of the two truths (convention and ultimate truth) also exists for all phenomena, not only for the self. It is important to note that the motivation for a Hinayana meditator is for liberation of the self, which means that he or she is searching for freedom from suffering for him/herself.

In the Bodhisattvayana level of Mahayana the two truths are convention truth and ultimate truth. The *convention truth* is similar within Hinayana and Mahayana, but the ultimate truth varies. From the Mahayana point of view the *ultimate truth* states that the independently existing self does not exist. This is also referred to as the emptiness of the self. In Mahayana, *wisdom* involves the understanding of the emptiness of the self and of all phenomena and *method* involves cultivating bodhi mind and bodhicitta (loving kindness to all living beings). In Mahayana, the *form body* arises from the method (loving kindness compassion to all) and the *wisdom body* arises from the understanding of sunyata (emptiness).

In the Vajrayana level of Mahayana, the understanding of the two foundations (convention truth and ultimate truth) are the same as the Bodhisattva level of Mahayana. However, where these two levels of practice differ significantly is in relation to the two paths and the practice. In Vajrayana (which is also sometimes referred to as Buddhist Tantra) there are many differences in the two paths (wisdom and method), but here I will mention only a few.

They are both Mahayana practice because they both include loving-kindness and compassion for all sentient beings. One main difference is where it relates to *wisdom*, even though there is no difference in the object of sunyata, the subject of consciousness is very different. By this, I mean



that in Bodhisattvayana, the coarse level of consciousness, the waking level of consciousness, is making the effort to understand emptiness. However, in Tantra, there is a concerted effort to access and use the subtle consciousness (the pure nature of the mind) to observe the emptiness of phenomena. Through dealing with the channels and the chakras, one may utilize the subtle consciousness which will, in combination with inner bliss, provide the understanding of sunyata. This is a significant difference. In relation to the *method* Bodhicitta and the six perfections are the same as in the Bodhisattvayana, however, in Tantra there exists the unique practice, to meditate on the four enlightened qualities, which are practiced from the beginning. The four enlightened qualities include: the environment, body, objects and deeds. For the beginner, to meditate on:

- the environment is to visualize the mandala
- the body is to visualize oneself as a deity
- the objects is to visualize the dakas and dakinis, who hold sacred objects, are surrounded by rainbows, and other enlightened qualities
- the deeds is to visualize oneself realizing compassionate acts throughout the universe.

This is also referred to as deity yoga. The result in Vajrayana is enlightened body and enlightened mind.

Overall, even though each yana is comprised of the same core elements, they perceive the two foundations, two paths and two results differently. They each offer distinct definitions and descriptions of these core elements as outlined above, and also attribute different timeframes for reaching enlightenment, with Vajrayana being the quickest and most intense practice to reach enlightenment, followed by Mahayana, and thirdly by Hinayana.

