

*Dear Dharma Friends,*

*Below are parts of the teaching excerpted from H.E. Kyabje Drukpa Choegon Rinpoche's Dharma Book – Cloudless Clarity, Volume I.*

*The full contents of the book are as the Table of Contents stated as follow:*

- I) *Understanding the Foundation of Tibetan Buddhism*
  - a) *On Dharma – the Teachings of Buddha*
  - b) *On Vajrayana - the Secret Mantrayana*
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- II) *On Proper Conduct – the right attitudes during Dharma related activities*
  
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## **Choegon Rinpoche's Dharma Q&A – Part II**

### **On Vajrayana - the Secret Mantrayana:**

#### **1) Rinpoche. What is Vajrayana or Tibetan Buddhism?**

A: Vajrayana or the Secret Mantrayana and also known as Tantrayana, is a branch of the Great Vehicle (Mahayana) that uses the special techniques of the Tantras to pursue the path of enlightenment.

It was originally developed in northwest India around 500 CE but was later adopted and greatly refined in Tibet. That's why it's also referred to as Tibetan Buddhism.

Buddhadharma or Buddhism began to come to Tibet sometime in the 7<sup>th</sup> century during the time of King Songtsen Gampo. In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism began to take root in Tibet, during the time of King Trisong Detsen. Guru Padmasambhava and Abbot Shantirakshita helped the King to establish the Dharma in Tibet, and translated many teachings into the Tibetan language.

After that, the lineages of Buddhism were transmitted throughout Tibet over many centuries and gradually developed into eight streams or lines of transmission, from teachers to students: the eight major practice lineages are known as the "Eight Great Chariots" or the "Eight Practice Lineages." Subsequently, over the centuries, the Buddhism of Tibet developed into four main streams or lineages known as the "Four Major Schools of Tibetan Buddhism."

The Great Vehicle, Mahayana, has two practice paths: the *Sutrayana* method of perfecting good qualities, and the *Vajrayāna* method of taking the intended outcome of Buddhahood as the path.

Vajrayana is often viewed as the third major Yana (or "vehicle") of Buddhism, alongside Theravada and Mahayana. According to this view, there were three "turnings of the wheel of dharma." In the first turning, Buddha Shakyamuni taught the Four Noble Truths at Varanasi which led to the Hinayana schools or the Lesser Vehicle; of which only the Theravada remains today. In the second turning, the Perfection of Wisdom sutras were taught at Vulture's Peak and this led to the Mahayana schools. The teachings which constituted the third turning of the wheel of dharma were taught at Shravasti and expounded that all beings have Buddha-nature. This third turning is described as having led to Vajrayana.

**2) Rinpoche. Why do people say that Vajrayana is the supreme teaching of Buddha? Aren't all Buddha's teachings the same?**

A: From the perspective of the preciousness of Buddha's teachings, we cannot choose one teaching over another, considering that this teaching of the Buddha is better than that one. All teachings should be respected equally, as they are all Buddha's teachings.

But Buddha himself also made differences when it came to teaching levels, because there are different levels. For example Buddha talks about the levels of relative truth, which are called teachings of the relative level. In Tibetan this is known as "drang don," or figurative meaning,

When Buddha taught about meditation and emptiness, these directly address the inner essence. Such categories come under the title called "ngedon." "Ngedon" means direct or definite meaning, and it applies to ultimate teachings. Ultimate teachings are higher and more precious, according to Buddha himself. We cannot use relative words to relate to the ultimate. But ultimate words are final. So, there are two categories: "drang don" at the relative level and "ngedon" at the ultimate level.

Vajrayana is called the fruition yana, or yana of the fruit. The Theravada and Mahayana paths, on the other hand, are called yanas of the seed, because basically, one practices on the seed to obtain the fruit of enlightenment. For instance, one needs to practice on the karmic cause and effect,

accumulate countless merit and purify karma, and gradually one can realize the true nature of mind and become enlightened.

Why is Vajrayana called the yana of fruit? The fruit is the form of the enlightened ones like Buddha, Dorje Sempa and other deities. From emptiness we transform our body, speech and mind into the Vajra Body, Vajra Speech and Vajra Mind. In this way we practice the fruit of ultimate Buddha enlightened form right here, right at this moment, taking the fruit as path. This is why this teaching of the Buddha is considered more precious and supreme.

Not only that, in Vajrayana there are also many other methods taught by Buddha: how to quickly accumulate merit, how to easily erase or purify karma, how to pacify obstacles and so on. Some of these methods are not taught or mentioned in the Theravada and other teachings.

Particularly when it comes to looking at the true nature of mind, the Vajrayana is very direct and very transcendental. In Dzogchen, Mahamudra, Kalachakra and other tantras, one finds instructions directly pointing out the nature of mind.

That is why even though, strictly speaking, Vajrayana can be superior, it is for one who has the faculty to practice properly, because it is direct and it is clear. It is for those who are ready; those who have accumulated merits to practice.

A vast number of great mahasiddhas attained enlightenment in India, Tibet and in many other places through the Vajrayana path in their respective lifetime. That's the difference.

**3) Rinpoche. Why are there always so many rituals and pujas or prayer ceremonies in Vajrayana?**

A: Vajrayana is based on the transformation of all illusory existences. The way Vajrayana perceives phenomena and existence is different from Theravada and Mahayana.

In Vajrayana, all phenomena are transformed into what we call pure land, or sacred outlook. That is to say, the universe is the deity's mandala; one's form, the human body, is the deity's form; one's speech is the sound of mantra; one's mind is the Dharmakaya, the Dharmadhatu mind. These points are introduced and instructed in Vajrayana practices. The ritual basically describes how phenomena around us - the environment, our body, our five skandhas, the sounds and the mind are transformed into the form of deities through visualization. This is clearly described in all the practices.

During the practice, through ritual, chanting and music we make symbolic offerings to the mandala. In fact we find rituals in all other Buddhist traditions, although it is true that in Vajrayana you may find longer ceremonies.

However, these rituals are not ordinary rituals. Outwardly, the way a Vajrayana ritual is performed may be no different from other rituals. Yet, if you go deeper into it, it's all about meditation and realization. It is not the normal ritual in which you just chant and pray. It has a much deeper meaning and the essence of it is transformation. We cannot even use the word transformation, for we are talking of Vajra body, Vajra speech and Vajra mind. It entails remaining in primordial awareness: primordially what is, as it is. So that's why there are rituals. But, we have to understand what those rituals mean, and what they represent.

So, actually it is as you say, there are many more rituals in Vajrayana than in other yanas.

**4) Rinpoche. Is it possible to be a Vajrayana practitioner, but not wishing to get involved in all those rituals?**

A: You can. You don't have to use music and all these instruments to perform the celebration-like rituals.

You can be a very simple practitioner. In fact, Vajrayana has many forms of practice. One way is to look into your true nature of mind and meditate on it. And when you understand the inner essence deeply and you are able to constantly anchor your mind to this essence, then, you can be a truly top Vajrayani. In order to do that, some people require deity practices—what is called the Developing Stage and the Perfection Stage.

Developing stage means the visualization of deities. Perfection stage means to meditate on the inner essence. The combination of these two is called the two paths of Vajrayana.

Certainly, you will also need the first level of practices, such as the Ngondro preliminary practices, also known as the Four Foundations. The Vajrasattva purification practice is essential because in countless lifetimes we have accumulated countless karma that, if not purified, will hinder our progress in the path.

You may have less developing stage practices but more meditation, but rituals you don't need to do. Milarepa did not practice all these rituals, and yet he got enlightened. Not only Milarepa, but many mahasiddhas go to caves to meditate. They don't need all these rituals.

Then, why are all these rituals done? There are two types of practices, one is done in monasteries with big gathering, which is very powerful and has an elaborate way of performing, which requires all these mass rituals. Rituals have become common monastic practices. For example, the practice of Chakra Sambara can be practiced by a single person in a cave in isolation adopting a simple yogic style of practice. Or if done in a monastery involving mass rituals, many lamas sit together in ritual chanting and creating a huge sand mandala. This is not a simple thing like creating a mandala through

visualization. In this way the ritual becomes a grand offering, a time of unity, and a common practice done together.

Hence, there are two traditional practices: the monastic tradition of having big pujas with rituals, and the individual practicing in caves or in isolation. No need to learn how to do all these rituals. You just take one deity as your Yidam and practice on that yidam, and you mainly meditate on your true nature of mind. That's the best.

**5) Rinpoche. What is the essence of Vajrayana?**

A: One essence of Vajrayana is as what I've mentioned earlier: the five skandhas, or our body, speech and mind must be ripened through practice into Buddha's body, Buddha's speech and Buddha's mind. This is introduced in the Developing Stage Practice, which begins with Empowerment from a master who possesses unbroken realization through lineage and daily practice.

Then, the other essence of Vajrayana practice is to understand our true nature of mind as Primordial Buddha through pointing out instructions. We Kagyupas rely on the Mahamudra teaching, boosted by the practice of Six Yogas of Naropa, and Six Equal Tastes, (Ro-snyom).

In the Sakyapa, to understand the true nature of mind through instructions is called Lamdre; Path and Result. In the Nyingmapa, through the practice of Dzogchen, with 'katag' (primordial purity) as the main practice, and 'thogal' (direct leap) as the method, they come to realize the fully enlightened state of mind, also known as primordial Samanthabhadra, Rangjung Yeshe (self-existing wisdom) or Rigpa (pure awareness). These are the practices of Vajrayana, basically: to know who you are.

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