

An Introduction to the Nine Yanas

What are the Nine Yanas?

The Sanskrit word 'yana' means vehicle, a set of teachings that when practiced 'carry' one to the level of fruition.

Our teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, taught a huge variety of teachings in order to tame the array of different sentient beings with their individual capacities and inclinations. In fact, it's said that the Buddha taught eighty-four thousand different teachings. This huge range of teachings can be condensed into the gradual path of the nine yanas or vehicles.

Why practice the Nine Yanas?

By practicing the nine yanas, one will have a better understanding and knowledge of how to practice the different teachings the Buddha taught. One will also learn how to study, reflect, and meditate in stages like the levels of a staircase.

The Buddha said that the meaning of all vehicles agrees at one point and that all the different paths arrive at the same point. In actuality there is only one vehicle—all the vehicles are one—so if you're not able to understand all the different paths then how will you understand the one point that they all arrive at?

Moreover, all the different paths that the Buddha taught are complete within the nine yanas. First are the three outer vehicles, which belong to the sutra teachings, the teachings of the causal vehicle of characteristics. These three outer vehicles are:

Hinayana

Path of Renunciation

1. Shravakayana
2. Pratyekabuddhayana

Mahayana

Path of Renunciation

3. Bodhisatvayana

Then from among the inner vehicles, first come the three outer tantras which are based on the causal vehicle of characteristics, the sutra teachings, but which include a little bit of the practice of the resultant vehicle of mantra. These are:

Vajrayana

Path of Purification

4. Kriya Tantra
5. Upa Tantra
6. Yoga Tantra

The last three yantras related to the secret vehicle of powerful transformative methods and the three inner tantras are:

Path of Transformation

7. Mahayoga
8. Anuyoga

Path of Self-liberation

9. Atiyoga

The extraordinary teachings of the secret mantra are taught in the above three inner tantric vehicles where the skilful means of the development stage, the wisdom of the completion stage, and the non-dual unity of the great perfection are emphasized in the maha, anu, and ati teachings respectively.

Each of the nine yantras has their own different view, conduct, meditation, and fruition, but they are not completely divorced from each other; each one is able to clarify the meaning of the previous one, and also the next. It's like learning the alphabet. Hence learning the view, conduct, meditation, and fruition of the first vehicle helps clarify the view, meditation, conduct, and fruition of the second and so forth.

Phakchok Rinpoche's teachings on the nine yantras follow a carefully structured set of study and practice materials. Rinpoche has compiled books for each yana containing a collection of texts by Indian panditas, Tibetan great masters, and words of the Buddha himself. These texts explain the view, meditation, conduct, fruition, and background of each yana, which are then elaborated on and explained by Rinpoche during the Nine Yantras' retreats. Furthermore, there is a specific sadhana for each yana. These sadhanas belong to the *Heart Essence of the Three Enlightened Families (Rigsum Nyingtik)* which is a branch teaching of the *Three Sections of the Great Perfection (Dzogchen Desum)*, a very famous text revealed by the supreme treasure revealer Chokgyur Lingpa. The three protectors—all of the buddhas' compassion manifest in the form of *Avalokiteshvara*, all of the buddhas' wisdom manifest in the form of *Manjushri*, and all of the buddhas' enlightened power manifest in the form of *Vajrapani*—are the main deities in these sadhanas and their form changes in each of the yantras. Therefore, this Nine Yantras course is a unique combination of study, meditation, and ritual practice on the gradual path to enlightenment.