

The Path of Joy and Ease – Five Year Practice Program

Teaching Philosophy and Outline

Our formal five-year practice program is focused on recognising and abiding in the natural state, which is spacious awareness alive with Bodhichitta (Dzogpachenpo). All of the practices in this program are from the Dzogchen Semde cycle of teachings. The destination for all those practicing in the Nyingma tradition is the realisation of *Dzogpachenpo*, the self-perfected natural state. Dzogchen is considered the “highest” and most precious of all Buddhist paths. According to Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, ‘all the trainings of the common yanas are steps to Dzogpa Chenpo’.¹ Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa made this clear when he wrote: ‘the three precepts, six perfections, development stage, perfection stage, and so on are the steps to the path of Dzogpa Chenpo’.² In other words, all of the lower yanas are not meant to be our permanent home. Our true home is Dzogpachenpo, which is our natural condition.

The Vajrayana (or tantric) vehicle consisting of ngondro, followed by generation and completion stage practices (dzogrim & kyerim), prepares the practitioner for Dzogchen and awakening into the natural condition. This program has the same aim of preparing the practitioner for realising Dzogpachenpo though does not follow the same trajectory. It does not include ngondro or any form of tantric accumulation practice. This is in line with the Dzogchen Semde approach and also the lineage of Milarepa who taught:

If you do not acquire contentment in yourselves,

¹ Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, *Buddha Mind: An Anthology of Longchen Rabjam's Writings on Dzogpa Chenpo*, Snow Lion Publications, 1989, p.91.

² Quoted in Tulku Thondup Rinpoche, *Buddha Mind: An Anthology of Longchen Rabjam's Writings on Dzogpa Chenpo*, Snow Lion Publications, 1989, p.91.

Heaped-up accumulations will only enrich others.³

The Path of Joy and Ease predates Tibetan Dzogchen by centuries and has its origin in India and Oddiyana, not Tibet. That being said, it aligns with much of the early Tibetan Dzogchen teachings, and shares much of the same language and approaches as the Tibetan tradition. In Tibet, this tradition became known as Dzogchen Semde, a term which we borrow because of its familiarity, though in our lineage we refer to these teachings as *Mahapurna* (maha is Sanskrit for “great”, purna is Sanskrit for “completion”). These Dzogchen teachings and approach to practice were first taught by Prahevajra (Grab Dorje in Tibetan), who received these teachings in pure visions around 655 CE. They were widely and publicly taught in Oddiyana for a century or so before they were taken to Tibet around 750 CE by Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, and Vairotsana, who were all students of Sri Singha, a Dzogchen Semde master.

Dzogchen Semde (Mahapurna) is not a graded path. The practices we do in Dzogchen Semde are the same on day one as they are on the day of our awakening. We are not introduced to more and more refined, subtle, or deeper practices over time. What becomes more and more refined, subtle, and deeper is our direct experience. In our lineage of Dzogchen Semde, which is far more Indian than Tibetan, originating in Oddiyana with Prahevajra (650 CE), the practices we engage in are: the Joy Practice (*Priti Yoga*, which includes Shamata), Sky-gazing, Guru Yoga, and Corpse Pose (*Savasana*). This is not unusual. From around 650 CE until around 1200 CE, this is how all Dzogchen lineages were. It is an established fact that sky-gazing and Guru Yoga were the heart practices of early Dzogchen.⁴ The inclusion of other practices in the Longde and Mennagde Dzogchen cycles, such as Rushen, Trekcho and Togyal, happened centuries later and is a response to the unique spiritual environment of Tibet, which was completely colonised by tantric thought and practice. These tantra-infused practices are not part of the original Semde tradition. In other words, they are not part of the Dzogchen teachings that Prahevajra taught. As such, they are not essential. That being said, the original Dzogchen tradition has equivalents. For example, Togyal, known as *Direct Seeing* in our lineage, is not a practice with visualisations and postures, but an experience, a “state”, a deepening of meditative experience

³ Evans-Wentz, Walter Yeeling, (eds.) *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa* (2nd ed.), Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 272.

⁴ Jean-Luc Achard, ‘The View of spyi-ti yoga’, *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, CNRS, 2015, pp.1-20.

through sky-gazing and/or devotion. Likewise, *Silent Stillness* is our equivalent of Shamata, *Clear Seeing* our equivalent of Vipashana and *Direct Knowing* is our equivalent of Trekcho.

True Dzogchen is profoundly simple, so simple that most people do not have the inclination or tolerance for it. This tradition is for the few, not the many. For those who do have the inclination and tolerance for it, this way of practicing is very, very swift. In this program, our depth of experience of the true nature will deepen year by year, rather than our conceptual or theoretical understating of Buddhism. This program is about awakening, not about knowledge acquisition. It is a path that does not include purification practices, rituals, accumulations, scholarly debate, or reliance on form-based supports that other paths offer. This is simply because everything we adopt we eventually need to abandon. As Rigdzin Jamyang Tenphel has noted:

Every single concept or belief that we adopt and cling to now, is just one more concept or belief that we will need to let go of in the future. Be mindful of this, and remain simple.⁵

One of the major differences in the Dzogchen Semde approach to other approaches is the emphasis on direct experience of the true nature of mind (rigpa), whereas other traditions emphasise renunciation, purification, transformation, and rituals/ceremonies, which are all different ways of working with our conditions, the state of our body, speech, mind, and environment, our habitual tendencies or karma. The Dzogchen Semde teachings do not say that our conditions, habitual tendencies, and karma are irrelevant, rather they emphasize a different way of dealing with them. In the Semde tradition we deal with karma through restign in the natural state and/or resting in devotion. As Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche taught:

The moment of recognizing mind essence totally interrupts the karma and obscurations, for that moment. It purifies the negative karma that has been continued from the past and it interrupts any creation henceforth. As long as this recognition lasts, karma and obscurations are

⁵ Jamyang Tenphel, *The Awakening Heart: 108 Pith Instructions for Buddhist Practice, Volume Two*, Timeless Awareness Publications, 2025.

completely ended. Complete stability in the recognition of empty cognizance, therefore, involves the total elimination of all obscurations and negative karma.⁶

This echoes an ancient teaching from the Mahasiddha Tilopa:

The darkness of a thousand aeons is powerless
To dim the crystal clarity of the sun's heart;
And likewise, aeons of samsara have no power
To veil the clear light of the mind's essence.⁷

In other words, karma and our habitual tendencies are dissolved through resting in our natural condition – timeless, nondual awareness (rigpa).

The Path of Joy and Ease focuses on calming the mind and awakening the heart to its natural condition in the simplest ways possible. Though it has its roots in the Dzogchen Semde tradition of Oddiyana, it also has roots in the Buddhist lineages of Southern India, particularly Andhra Pradesh, where Sri Singha's Dzogchen lineage flourished. Our lineage and this program focus on the simple but undeniable power of joy and true rest. As a path, this focus on joy and ease is unique in the contemporary Dharma environment. However, there are many scriptural sources supporting the idea that joy can be used as a complete path. The Buddha himself said that joy was the path to awakening, as recorded in the Mahasaccaka Sutra (MN 36).

⁶ Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, *Vajra Speech: A Commentary on the Quintessence of Spiritual Practice, the Direct Instructions of the Great Compassionate One*, Rang Jung Yshe Publications, 2004, P. 85.

⁷ “Tilopa's Mahamudra Teaching to Naropa (in Twenty Eight Verses)”, translated by Keith Dowman. See the full teaching here: <https://keithdowman.net/mahamudra/tilopas-mahamudra-teaching.html>

After the Buddha had learned meditation from his two main teachers, Uddaka Rāmaputta and Āḷāra Kālāma, and found that these forms of meditation did not lead to liberation, he then underwent harsh ascetic practices, which he eventually also found were not effective. The Buddha then recalled a meditative state he'd entered spontaneously as a child. As the Buddha recounts in the Mahasaccaka Sutra:

"I thought: 'I recall once, when my father the Sakyan was working, and I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple tree, then—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful mental qualities—I entered and remained in the first jhana: rapture and pleasure born from solitude, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. Could that be the path to Awakening?' Then following on that memory came the realization: 'That is the path to Awakening.'" (MN 36)

Here, quite clearly, the Buddha is indicating that the first step to true enlightenment starts with rapture (joy) found in nature, rest, relaxation and solitude. According to the Buddha, simple, natural joy is the foundation of the path, if not the whole path to Awakening. All the other meditations and practices taught in the various traditions, from Theravada to Mahayana to Dzogchen, must be based on a foundation of simple, restful joy and solitude. If they're not, then they are unlikely to work. The connection between joy as a meditative practice and awakening, though now somewhat obscured, was long understood. Take as an example this teaching from Dogen (1200 – 1253), the founder of the Soto Zen school:

Zazen [simply sitting silently] is not learning meditative concentration. It is the Dharma gate of great ease and joy. It is nondual practice-realization.

The Path of Joy and Ease awakens the heart through joy and, because it is concerned with the heart, is a profoundly compassionate path. Compassion is not just the wish that sentient beings not suffer. It is also the wish that they know joy, that they be joyful and happy. Compassion always moves toward joy because it arises from joy and love. Indeed, Tulku Thondup makes this very clear when he defines compassion as 'the wish that no one should suffer or be separated from joy'.⁸ The surest way to bring joy to others is to be joyful ourselves. Joy is truly infectious and transformative. It swiftly awakens

⁸ Tulku Thondup, *The Heart of Unconditional Love: A Powerful New Approach to Loving-Kindness Meditation*, Shambhala Publications, 2015, p.58.

the heart and, according to the Buddha and the Mahasaccaka Sutra, leads to stable states of Samadhi that then lead to abiding in the natural state. Life in samsara is hard and miserable enough, so why not make our Dharma practice a bright, joyful part of our life?

There are certain traditions within the Dzogchen Semde that also foreground joy, such as the tradition coming down to us from Princess Barani (650 CE), a lineage holder of the Semde and the mother of Prahevajra (665 CE), the master from Oddiyana who was the source of all Dzogchen teachings. When asked to summarise the entire Dzogchen path, Princess Barani gave the following pith instruction:

Joyfully delight in the uninterrupted vision of the objects of the six senses!

Whatever you enjoy, Bodhi will blaze more and more.

When one has obtained the power of supreme presence and become familiar with it,

Meditating means leaving the six sense consciousnesses free and relaxed!⁹

Here Princess Barani makes clear the dominance of joy in the Dzogchen path, which awakens us to our natural condition (Dzogpachenpo or Buddha Nature). Indeed, joy is at the heart of Dzogchen Semde. In the Dzogchen Semde tradition, our Lord Buddha is often given the honorific title "The Joyful One" and the Path of Dzogchen Semde, characterised by the practices of Sky-Gazing and devotion, is often described as "the mother of all Joyful Ones", meaning that it is the way that all Buddhas awaken. This phrasing is used by Manjushrimitra in his "Refining Ore into Gold", which is a key Semde text.¹⁰ It also appears in the pith instructions of many masters. Likewise, pure and total presence, the uncontrived natural condition, which is realisation, is described by Manjushrimitra as synonymous with "pure delight" or joy.¹¹ This echoes *The Sutra that Brings Together the Contemplations of All the Buddhas* (translated by Christopher Wilkinson):

⁹ Princess Barani (650 CE), Bhikshuni and lineage master of the Dzogchen Semde tradition and the mother of Prahevajra (Garab Dorje). This pith instruction is from the Nyingma Kama, the ancient canon of Nyingma scripture. Also quoted in Chogyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, *The Supreme Source*, 1999, p.37.

¹⁰ Manjushrimitra, Namkhai Norbu (Translator), Kennard Lipman (Translator), *Primordial Experience: An Introduction to Dzogchen Meditation*, Shambhala Publications, 1987, p. 70.

¹¹ Manjushrimitra, Namkhai Norbu (Translator), Kennard Lipman (Translator), *Primordial Experience: An Introduction to Dzogchen Meditation*, Shambhala Publications, 1987, p. 72.

Our joy is not corrupt.
We have no regrets.
We are totally perfect,
For emptiness has no self.
When our uncorrupt thusness
Is completely perfected,
To be uncontrived is actually the way that it is.

It is not widely understood that the state of Dzogpachenpo can be approached in many different ways, not merely via tantra (Vajrayana) or practices such as Trekcho and Togyal from the Longde and Mennagde Dzogchen traditions. For example, the Dzogchen Semde teachings contain a way of approaching Dzogpachenpo, our natural condition or Rigpa, through the gradual development of meditative experience. It's important to note that gradual does not equal graded – our experience gradually deepens, though the practices are the same from beginning to end. This meditative experience is gained through successive experience of four "yogas" that form the Semde tradition's foundational practice. These yogas are not separate practices but a deepening of experience in the single practice of sky-gazing (or Guru Yoga). Other Dzogchen traditions (Longde and Mennagde) do not contain this type of foundational practice and so are normally approached through the Tantric ngondro and generation and completion stage practices. Also, Dzogchen Semde does not focus on Trekcho, which is a characteristic of the Mennagde teachings, but culminates in an experience that is precisely the same. Chogyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche makes this clear when, noting the equivalence between the Fourth Yoga of Dzogchen Semde (*lhundrup*) and trekcho, he writes that:

... there is no difference between the state of lhundrub and the trekcho spoken of in the Dzogchen Upadesha [Mennagde].¹²

A further difference between Dzogchen Semde and other Dzogchen traditions is the fact that the Semde does not rely solely on direct introduction of the natural state by a living Guru, as does the Longde and Mennagde. In the Semde, direct experience of the natural state occurs through the practice of sky-gazing and

¹²Namkhai Norbu, *Dzogchen Teachings*, Shambhala Publications, 2006, p.98.

Guru Yoga. That being said, a teacher is still required to give transmission for the practices and to provide instruction and guidance. Semde is perfect for modern practitioners because it provides a means of access to Dzogchen which bypasses all stages of Tantric practice, which are unsuitable to many because they are time-consuming and can also be quite risky. The Four Yogas of Dzogchen Semde are not restricted, as they are seen as foundational, though they do require transmission and the support of a guide or teacher.

Another way to reach the natural state of Dzogpachenpo is by awakening the heart through joy, love, compassion and devotion. This method is core to the *Path of Joy and Ease*. This path of awakening the heart through compassion and devotion is also a Dzogchen path, though it does not rely on tantra or practices such as Trekcho and Togyal, as the realisations of these practices arise naturally through the softening of the mind and opening of the heart. Many masters, including Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, have pointed out the superiority of this kind of path.¹³

Furthermore, historically speaking, Dzogchen was often approached as completely separate path to Vajrayana or tantric Buddhism (the path of transformation). Chogyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche makes this clear:

Some people believe that Dzogchen is only the final phase of tantric practice, rather like the Mahamudra of the modern tradition, but this is because the arrival point of the path of anuyoga, too, is called Dzogchen. In reality, Dzogchen atiyoga is a path complete in itself, and ... is not dependent on the-methods-of the path of transformation.¹⁴

Indeed, one of the oldest Dzogchen texts from the Semde tradition includes an instruction from Samantabhadra that rejects all tantric or transformational styles of practice:

¹³ Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel*, Shambhala Publishing, 1999, pp. 92-93.

¹⁴ Chogyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, 'The Supreme Source: The Fundamental Tantra of Dzogchen Semde', *Snow Lion Newsletter*, Autumn 1999.

Do not practice in the worldly way by meditating on the form of a deity as the activity of the body, by reciting mantras and formulae as the activity of the voice, or by visualizing and concentrating as the activity of the mind.¹⁵

Some Dzogchen teachers faithfully abide by this instruction, while others, especially those in the lineage of Longchenpa (1308–1364) and Jigme Lingpa (1730–1798), see Dzogchen only or primarily as the culmination of the tantric path. It was Longchenpa who first conceived of and taught the idea that Dzogchen was the final stage of a progressive or graded tantric path, and Jigme Lingpa who truly entrenched that idea. This notion that Dzogchen must be preceded by tantra, especially ngondro, is now so widely accepted in Vajrayana circles that it is considered heresy to say otherwise. The reason for this ignorance is the sad fact that in Tibet, and now in the Tibetan diaspora, received knowledge, which is often flawed, is privileged over critical inquiry and fact-based research. The truth of the matter, borne out by the textual and historical evidence, is that up until the 1300s, the time of Longchenpa, Dzogchen was often practiced completely separately to tantric forms of practice. This is starkly illustrated by one of the earliest Dzogchen Semde texts, *The Total Space of Vajrasattva*, which rejects all tantric practice, describing it as "a childish pursuit"¹⁶

This program faithfully abides by the above instruction from Samantabhadra to not focus on tantric forms of practice. This is why we do not require ngondro or any generation or completion stage practice as a prerequisite. That being said, a foundation of fundamental understandings and practices needs to be laid. This foundation consists of developing a heart awareness of The Four Dharma Seals:

1. *Anicca* (impermanence)
2. *Shunyata* and *Anatta* (emptiness and non-self)
3. *Dukkha* – the suffering of illusory dualistic states
4. *Śānti* – the nondual peace of Nirvana

¹⁵ Chogyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche, *The Supreme Source: The Fundamental Tantra of Dzogchen Semde*, (trans. Adriano Clemente), Shambhala Publications, 1999, p. 127.

¹⁶ Liljenberg, Karen (2012) *A critical study of the thirteen later translations of the Dzogchen mind series*. PhD Thesis. SOAS, University of London, p.50.

The first two years of the program lay this necessary foundation. Heart awareness is not developed through scholarly study, but through contemplation and retreat. As such, the program includes at-home retreats as a core part of the process. In the Dzogchen Semde approach we also utilise pith instructions to deepen our understanding of essential concepts rather than scholarly study or debate.

Furthermore, the program is based on the profound concept of *natural unfolding* – that by engaging in simple, essential practices all the realisations of the “higher” teachings such as Mahamudra and Dzogchen evolve naturally and effortlessly. These simple practices are the essence of all the yanas or vehicles. The essence of the Sutrayana is ethical discipline, renunciation, solitude and meditation (Shamatha and Vipashana). The essence of the Mahayana is the Four Immeasurables – joy, love, compassion and equanimity. The essence of the Vajrayana and Dzogchen is Guru Yoga. Each of the vehicles is perfect and complete in itself. Each vehicle and its practices are sufficient to bring about awakening on their own. This program zeroes in on the quintessential practices of each vehicle and as such is the condensed essence of all Dharma. It is a *parallel* path to that of Tibetan-style Dzogchen, leading to the same result, the self-perfected natural state. The program has two completely equal streams:

1. The Stream of Devotion – for those drawn to devotion and Guru Yoga
2. The Stream of Immeasurable Joy – for those drawn to the practice of joy, love and compassion

A third stream focusing on the bardos (in-between states) can be added to either of the above streams in Level Two, though it is completely optional. The Stream of Immeasurable Joy begins with the awakening of joy and culminates in realisation of the true nature of mind and the ability to rest in that pristine state at will. Indeed, joy can be an entire path in itself. As Kyabje Togden Amtrin has said:

Arouse joy and rest in its natural radiance!

Not only is this the heart of the path,

but indeed it is the heart of Awakening.¹⁷

The Devotion Stream also awakens the heart and leads to realisation of the natural state very swiftly. Both the Devotion Stream and the Stream of Immeasurable Joy have a strong emphasis on a specific form of Shamatha or Calm Abiding meditation, which we call *Silent Stillness*. With regard to this specific form of Shamatha meditation, which is fuelled by an open heart, the extraordinary Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche wrote:

Even without other modes of introduction from the guru, these pith instructions of mind resting upon itself offer a simple way to calm the mind that has none of the dangers associated with the forceful manipulation of energy. If you are able simply to place the mind upon itself in this way, workable concentration will be won swiftly and with little difficulty. Here there is no need for meditation upon subtle bindus/drops in the heart, nor upon letters, nor any shape and form for that matter. Nor is there a need to manipulate the breath.¹⁸

In this quote Mipham Rinpoche is stating that Dzogchen-style Shamatha brings about the same outcomes of so-called “higher” yogic practices such as tsa-lung, trulkuhor and tummo and the same realisations that arise from generation and completion stage practices that involve visualisation and mantra recitation. He goes on to write that this simple practice combined with devotion will lead to ‘an experience of the empty clarity of the great Natural State—the spontaneous, self-emergent wisdom, which is the meaning of the Luminous Great Perfection’.¹⁹ Here Mipham Rinpoche is clearly saying that this simple practice can lead to the realization of Dzogchen.

It’s important to note that devotion does not have to be focused on a guru. It can be toward any or all of the three gems—the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha—or their embodiment the Lama or Guru. Devotion towards the Dharma is an appropriate alternative to devotion to a Guru. By Dharma we mean both the teachings and the practice, but there should be an emphasis on the practice. Devotion to the Dharma begins as confidence in the practice or trust that the practice will lead to our liberation from suffering and enlightenment. That confidence evolves into devotion. What does

¹⁷ Kyabje Togden Amtrin quoted in Jamyang Tenphel, *The Awakening Heart: 108 Pith Instructions for Buddhist Practice*, Timeless Awareness Publications, 2023, p. 11.

¹⁸ Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche, *Profound Shamatha Instruction*, translated by Sean Price, 2019, p.3.

¹⁹ Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche, *Profound Shamatha Instruction*, translated by Sean Price, 2019, p.4.

devotion to Dharma practice look like? It is simply to love the practice, to deeply appreciate it, and to experience great gratitude and joy that we have the opportunity to practice. We also experience great joy in the doing of the practice.

Dudjom Rinpoche pointed to the notion of *natural unfolding*, in which foundational and simple practices lead to the highest realisations naturally, with relation to Guru Yoga when he taught that practitioners who ‘give themselves wholeheartedly, with devotion, to an authentic Diamond Master’ will obtain the supreme and common accomplishments ‘even if they have no other methods’.²⁰ This is a very clear statement that awakening can and does unfold from this one simple practice of Guru Yoga. He said this was possible even ‘without depending on anything else’.²¹ In other words no other practices are needed, though some make powerful supports. This quote by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche makes this even clearer:

There may be very high practices, like *trekcho* and *thogal* in the Dzogpa Chenpo, but for us to practice these at this point would be like giving solid food to a very young baby. He would not be able to assimilate the food, and it would just cause him harm. If we were to try now to practice those advanced teachings, they would just be wasted. Through the blessings that come from genuine endeavor in the practice of this Guru Yoga, on the other hand, the realization of Dzogpa Chenpo will arise by itself from the depths of our being like morning sun, and the meaning of the practice of trekcho and thogal will dawn within us.²²

By relying on the principle of natural unfolding we are able to bypass the many complicated and sometimes arduous preliminaries normally associated with higher-level tantric Buddhism. Although participants are free to engage in other Buddhist practices the program will work best with as simple a practice schedule as possible.

²⁰ Dudjom Rinpoche, *A Torch Lighting the Way to Freedom*, Shambhala Publications, 2016, P. 260.

²¹ Dudjom Rinpoche, *A Torch Lighting the Way to Freedom*, Shambhala Publications, 2016, P. 260.

²² Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel*, Shambhala Publishing, 1999, pp. 92-93.

To be clear, this five year program is not a tantric or esoteric one, but one inspired by the simplicity and openness of the Dzogchen, Mahamudra and Chan traditions, with an emphasis on opening of the heart. There is an ancient tradition of awakening to the self-perfected natural state by awakening the heart with devotion. Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche explains this further:

According to Dzogchen, and the special approach of the great Dzogchen master Sri Singha, there is a way of recognizing the nature of mind solely through devotion. There are cases of practitioners who simply through their heartfelt devotion attained realization, even though their teacher had already passed away or was nowhere near them physically. Because of their prayers and devotion, the nature of mind was introduced. The classic example is that of Jigme Lingpa and his consuming devotion for Longchen Rabjam.²³

The following quote from Dudjom Rinpoche drives this point home:

The lama's blessings, like spring warming up soil and water –
If they don't enter into me, there is no way
to be introduced to the nature of mind.
When there is a shortcut, why take the long way around?
May I truly practice the sublime teachings.²⁴

The alternative to opening the heart and recognising our ultimate nature through devotion is opening the heart through joy, which then leads to the natural unfolding of the other of the Four Immeasurables: Love, Compassion and Equanimity. A being who has attained the Four Immeasurables is a

²³ Nyoshul Khenpo Rinpoche quoted in Marcia Binder Schmidt (ed.) *Dzogchen Essentials: The Path that Clarifies Confusion*, Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 2004, p. 136.

²⁴ Dudjom Rinpoche, Jigdral Yeshe Dorje, *A Garland of Essential Points for Students - Heart-Essence of the Great Masters*. Translated by Bhakha Tulku Rinpoche and Constance Wilkinson.

Buddha. The five year practice program offers both these approaches, the path of joy and the path of devotion or Guru Yoga. Participants can engage with one stream or, preferably, both.

Traditionally, there are multiple approaches to the self-perfected natural state (Dzogpachenpo) or awakening. All of these approaches are different yet equal. The four main approaches are:

1. The tantric pathway consisting of a foundation of ngondro followed by three roots practice (generation and completion stage) followed by trekcho and togal. This is currently the most common pathway.
2. The devotional pathway consisting of Shamatha and Guru Yoga as the foundation in which the realisations of trekcho and togal unfold naturally. Guru Yoga includes the three roots in that the guru is the embodiment of Lama, Yidam and Dakini.
3. The Dzogchen Semde path of gradual meditative realisation.
4. Meditation pathway consisting of Shamatha, the Four Applications of Mindfulness (Vipashana) and contemplation of the Four Immeasurables to awaken the heart.

The Path of Joy and Ease Five Year Program is a unique combination of the second, third and fourth pathways. Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, when asked what practitioners could do as a foundation for Dzogchen if they didn't want to take the ngondro pathway, said that they should follow pathway four.²⁵ This echoes the pathway outlined by Longchenpa (1308–1364) in his seminal work *The Great Chariot*, which is an outline of the Nine Yanas (vehicles or stages) of Vajrayana practice according to the Nyingma tradition, which covers Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen. In *The Great Chariot*, Longchenpa doesn't mention ngondro at all, but does dedicate an entire chapter to The Four Immeasurables. He also describes Shamatha and Vipashana as “the main means of practice” for Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen. He writes that through Shamatha and Vipashana alone there is liberation:

²⁵ Quoted by B Alan Wallace, ‘Commentary on The Fine Path of Liberation by Sera Khandro’, <https://youtu.be/d9RuPg3PEmQ>

Moreover, the nature of mind continually exists in its natural state, its natural manner of inexpressible evenness that does not come, go, or remain anywhere at all. The half of this that is the aspect of vividness and clarity is vipashana. The aspect of abiding and resting is shamatha. Their non-duality is called their union. Because it always exists in all beings, luminous clarity is easily encountered when there is the comfort and ease of natural motionlessness and so forth. Whether the yogin is emanating or resting, by knowing shamatha/vipashana where everything is left as it is without fabrication or defilement, there is liberation.²⁶

Interestingly, Thich Nhat Hanh also taught that Shamatha, the Four Applications of Mindfulness (Vipashana) and contemplation of the Four Immeasurables were the essential Dharma practices. Indeed, one of the earliest of the Buddhist sutras, the *Rhinoceros Sutra*, extols everything that is needed to achieve awakening as originally taught by the Buddha. That sutra has a heavy emphasis on renunciation, solitude, right view (impermanence, emptiness and suffering of samsara) and the Four Immeasurables. This program is faithful to that early Buddhist tradition.

Furthermore, Westerners tend to meet with the Dharma later in life and may not have the time to complete the tantric pathway with ngondro etc. The great Dzogchen master Yangthang Rinpoche was asked about this by a woman in her mid-50s. His response was that, given her age, she should focus on Dzogchen even if she hadn't finished the tantric preliminaries (ngondro). Therefore, those of us who are 50 or older should definitely heed this advice.²⁷ Furthermore, Lama B Alan Wallace has noted that if a practitioner has no desire to do ngondro and no faith in that practice then there would be no benefit in them following that pathway. Therefore, people with no desire or faith in tantric practice or ngondro should follow pathways two or three. The program we have designed is perfect for those who are older or who have challenges such as illness, as well as for those who have no faith in complex tantric practices.

The program is framed by the structure of View, Meditation and Conduct. This is the View, Meditation and Conduct of the Dzogchen Semde teachings. Participants in the program will be supported by focused teaching and individualised practice guidance. Guest Lamas will contribute to the teaching

²⁶ Longchenpa, *The Great Chariot*, Chapter 12, part 2b.2.

²⁷ Quoted by B Alan Wallace, 'Commentary on The Fine Path of Liberation by Sera Khandro', <https://youtu.be/d9RuPg3PEmQ>

program from time to time. After completing this five year program, participants will have firmly established themselves on the path to awakening. The practice program leaders, Pema Düddul and Jamyang Tenphel, see themselves as simple conduits for the teachings and compassion of their heart masters – Kyabje Togden Amtrin and Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche. Any benefit to the participants from doing the program is a result of the blessings of these Lamas and the participants' other teachers.

The practice commitment for this program is an hour per day as well as attendance at an online weekend retreat each year. Participants are also expected to do at least one at home retreat per year. The progression from year to year is not based on tests or accumulations but on time, completion of the program requirements and an interview with the program leader/s (Lama Pema and Jamyang-la). **It is important to note that success in this program will require the participants to simplify their Dharma activity.** It is preferable (though not compulsory) for participants to limit their practice and study to only that which is taught in the program. This is especially true of practice. Engaging with other forms of practice can block development on this pathway. Simplicity is absolutely key to the Dzogchen Semde.

To cover the costs of providing this program there is a suggested contribution of **\$15AUD per month** (which includes PA Foundation membership). If you are experiencing financial difficulty you can apply for a scholarship for each level of the program by contacting us.

LEVEL/YEAR	VIEW/CORE TEXTS	MEDITATION/PRACTICE	CONDUCT/ETHICS	RETREATS
Level 1: Resting in Silent Stillness	1. <i>Stilling the Mind</i> – Dudjom Lingpa’s Shamatha instructions (trans. B. Alan Wallace) 2. Mipham Rinpoche’s <i>Profound Instruction on Shamatha</i>. 3. Sections of <i>Resting in Stillness</i> by Jamyang Tenphel & Pema Düddul; 4. Sera Khandro’s <i>The Fine Path to Liberation</i>. 5. <i>The Seven Mind Trainings</i> by Longchenpa. Fundamental concepts: impermanence, samsaric suffering, liberation.	1. Silent Stillness (equiv. Shamata). Gentle awareness of object, either the breath or another object. 2. Joy Practice 3. Dzogchen Semde First Yoga 4. Contemplations: impermanence, suffering, Bodhicitta, and cause and effect. Optional practices: Outer Guru Yoga.	1. Upasaka/Upasika ethical precepts. 2. Contemplation and application of the Six Paramitas. 3. Those who are keeping all five of the Upasaka/Upasika precepts wear a white meditation shawl during practice and at teachings. The wearing of the white shawl is part of the Upasaka/Upasika tradition as well as part of the Pristine Dzogchen tradition.	1. <i>Annual Retreat (online and in-person)</i> 2. Personal retreat on Impermanence
Level 2: Cultivating Clear Seeing <i>Pre-requisite: 12 months of Shamatha at least 20 minutes a day.</i>	1. Dudjom Rinpoche’s <i>Play of Thought</i>; 2. <i>Fathoming the Mind</i> – Dudjom Lingpa’s Vipashana instructions (trans. B. Alan Wallace); 3. Sections of <i>Resting in Stillness</i> by Jamyang Tenphel and Pema Düddul; 4. Sections of <i>Luminous Awareness</i> by Pema Düddul;	1. Clear Seeing (equiv. Vipashana) practice. Looking into thoughts and sensations: from whence do they arise, where do they abide, where do they go? 2. Joy Practice 3. Dzogchen Semde Second Yoga 4. Contemplations: Tsewa (contemplations on love) and Buddha Nature. 5. Resting Body, Speech and Mind in the Natural State (Corpse Pose).	1. Upasaka/Upasika ethical precepts and Anagarika vows while on retreat (8 precepts). 2. Contemplation and application of the Six Paramitas. 3. Those who are keeping all five of the Upasaka/Upasika precepts wear a white meditation shawl during practice and at teachings.	1. <i>Annual Retreat (online and in-person)</i> 2. Personal retreat on Buddha Nature

	5. <i>Retreat</i> by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo. Fundamental concepts: Loving kindness, fundamental goodness, Buddha Nature.	6. Outer Guru Yoga. Relying on devotion to invigorate and deepen the practice.¹ Optional practices: Sky Gazing, Illusory Form Practice (Dream Yoga etc.).		
Level 3: Direct Knowing <i>Pre-requisite: 12 months of meditation at least 20 minutes a day; Lung or transmission for texts</i> Note: We remain at this level for 24 months.	Full details released on entering this level Fundamental concepts: Compassion, non-self, emptiness, true nature of mind, unadorned awareness.	1. Direct Knowing (equiv. Trekcho). Looking into the nature of the mind itself: What is its shape, colour, texture? From whence does it arise, where does it abide, where does it go? 2. Joy Practice 3. Dzogchen Semde Third Yoga 4. Contemplations: Nyingje (compassion), Shunyata (emptiness). 5. Inner Guru Yoga. Relying on devotion to invigorate and deepen the practice.¹ 6. Resting Body, Speech and Mind in the Natural State (Corpse Pose). 7. Sky Gazing Optional practices: Illusory Form Practice (Dream Yoga etc.).	1. Upasaka/Upasika ethical precepts and Anagarika vows while on retreat (8 precepts). 2. Contemplation and application of the Six Paramitas. 3. Those who are keeping all five of the Upasaka/Upasika precepts wear a white meditation shawl during practice and at teachings. 4. From year 3: Wearing of lineage meditation belt during sky-gazing (if needed) and at events. From year 4: Wearing a white meditation skirt during practice and at teachings (transmission required).	Year 3 1. <i>Annual Retreat (online and in-person)</i> 2. Personal retreat on Shunyata (emptiness) Year 4 1. <i>Annual Retreat (online and in-person)</i> 2. Personal retreat on Sky-Gazing
Level 4: Direct Seeing <i>(Pre-requisite: 24 months at level 3; Lung or transmission for texts; Direct introduction to the true nature of mind by a qualified teacher)</i>	Full details released on entering this level Fundamental concepts: Equanimity, self-liberation of mental phenomena, non-meditation, unadorned primordial awareness.	1. Direct Seeing (equiv. Tögal and Self-Liberating Meditation, or Gompa Rangdrol). Remaining in the true nature of experience and resting in the true nature of mind. 2. Joy Practice 3. Dzogchen Semde Fourth Yoga 4. Contemplations: Tangnyom (equanimity/evenness). 5. Secret Guru Yoga. Relying on devotion to invigorate and deepen the practice.¹	1. Upasaka/Upasika ethical precepts and Anagarika vows while on retreat (8 precepts). 2. Contemplation and application of the Six Paramitas. 3. Those who are keeping all five of the Upasaka/Upasika precepts wear a white meditation shawl during practice and at teachings. 4. Wearing of lineage meditation belt during sky-gazing (if needed) and at events.	1. <i>Annual Retreat (online and in-person)</i> 2. Two Personal retreats on Direct Seeing

		6. Resting Body, Speech and Mind in the Natural State (Corpse Pose). 7. Sky Gazing and/or Darkness Meditation (Yangti). Optional practices: Illusory Form Practice (Dream Yoga etc.).	5. Wearing a white meditation skirt during practice and at teachings(transmission required).	
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1. In the Pristine Awareness practice mandala the gurus are Kyabje Togden Amtrin, Kyabje Dudjom Rinpoche (Jigdral Yeshe Dorje), Shakyamuni Buddha, Prahevajra, Padmasambhava, and Khandro Yeshe Tsogyal.