

## Reincarnation & the 4 Kayas

**Introduction:** Good evening everybody. I am very happy to see you and to give a short talk on Reincarnation and the 4 kayas. My English is not so good, so I will keep it brief and simple so you won't get too bored!!

All religions have their unique answer to the topic of the afterlife. We have such a rich diversity of metaphysical and philosophical views among the world religions. **Why so?** No single religion can fit the psychological and spiritual make up of each and every character living on the planet which I believe is about 7 billion. As the Dalai Lama once said when asked what the best religion was, he replied, **"Yours!"** Any serious seeker of a religious path will often go through great hardships to meet and identify their spiritual needs and aspirations.

As human beings on planet Earth, we all seek a path that will help give purpose and meaning to this short life. Attaining all the benefits of materialism doesn't always seem to satisfy: there is still a lurking discontentment even for the richest of people on the planet. To counter this, religions have evolved to give answers to our existential questions. Each religion has contributed to this and helped shape how we see and act in the world. All religions encourage us to act morally and to care for our neighbours who share this beautiful planet.

When we look at the **positive behaviour** of adherents to each of the world religions, we can see that if they follow a theistic tradition, then out of love and devotion to God, they will care for and honour all of God's creation.

Similarly, in the Buddhist tradition, although we don't hold that there is a creator, we also see it as our ethical and moral responsibility to bring to fruition our true potential for love, compassion and wisdom in order to be of benefit to all sentient beings.

I have heard it said that you die as you lived. As a logical consequence of this, our various religious traditions agree on the simple formula of you ***reap what you sow***. This then places great importance on how we conduct ourselves during our life and what path we choose to help shape and mature our characters. I think we would all agree that all beings want to be happy and free from fear. This begs the question: **how can we manifest these qualities in our being?**

From the Buddhist perspective, we would simply say all suffering comes from self-cherishing and all happiness comes from cherishing others. As a

Buddhist, we study, reflect and meditate on the problems that generate negative mind states and use appropriate antidotes to placate and finally remove them to reveal our true nature; which a Buddhist would call **Buddha Nature** and refers to the true essence of all sentient beings. There is no difference between a Buddha and an ordinary being other than a Buddha is fully enlightened and ordinary beings suffer due to not understanding the true nature of reality. **Why do ordinary beings suffer?** Through the grasping preferences of ego clinging. Therefore, if this “I-ness” be at the root of our problems, logically, we have to ask **what is this “I?”**

In Buddhism, we talk of the 5 skandhas which are the psycho-physical components that go to make up a human being. They are in brief, form, feeling, perceptions, mental activity and consciousness. Often referred to as the 5 aggregates or 5 heaps as they cause a heap of trouble! **Why trouble?** Because we identify with too much attachment to these aggregates, they produce the illusion of a self.

In Buddhist meditation, the great masters have all revealed and experienced and realised that there is no such “I” that can be found. This might seem scary to many but actually it is very liberating to have this realisation. **Why?** When there is no “thing” or no “I” to defend, then we can truly relax into the security of shunyata or emptiness. This spacious awareness has no centre or “I-ness”. **So what does it have?** In Buddhism we refer to the **4 kayas**. They are **Svabhavikakaya, Dharmakaya, Sambogakaya and Nirmanakaya**.

In brief, the **Svabhavikakaya**, is defined as the aspect of enlightened form that is distinguished by [two-fold purity](#), the natural purity of basic space of reality and the purification of all temporary stains.

Upon the attainment of [buddhahood, enlightenment](#) manifests at three levels, which are known as the three bodies of the [Buddha](#): the Absolute or Truth Body, or **Dharmakaya**; the Enjoyment Body, or [Sambogakaya](#); and the Emanation Body, or [Nirmanakaya](#).

Put more simply, the dharmakaya is a buddha’s own realisation experienced only by a buddha. The sambogakaya is a continuous divine manifestation experienced only by highly evolved beings and the nirmanakaya is a buddha, such as the historical buddha of 2500 years ago, who can be perceived by ordinary beings. What they understand by his presence of course will depend on their own level of spiritual awakening.

Some may see him as an ordinary person while others as a fully realised being.

Let me try to put this into more everyday language The Buddha said, “He who sees my form does not see me.” **Now how would you understand that?** It means basically, I am not my form. Perhaps we could say - I am not my body but that which inhabits it. This means Buddha isn't a physical form, Buddha means being awake. So logically, there must be a form of the Buddha that we can't see. The true nature which is termed the **dharmakaya**. **. So if that is the true Buddha, what is the form that I see?** This is not perceived by the senses: that's the **sambogakaya**. In terms of what we can see, students of the Vajrayana nurture devotion to their teacher in order to remove confusion until they see the teacher as a manifestation of the **nirmanakaya**. Therefore the journey is towards uprooting ego clinging and developing pure perception in order to see the guru as Buddha. A student will get the benefits from the teacher according to whatever level of purity and maturity he has reached. However, once all faulty projections based on ego have been removed, the student and teacher can have a true meeting of minds not separated by dualistic notions.

With this in mind, I will tell you a little of the tulku system that evolved in Tibet. To recognise a Tulku, a system evolved that would include for example a predictive letter from the previous incarnation which would state where the new tulku would be found and the naming of the family and area where to conduct the search. Other factors would be the reincarnation's ability to recount his previous life and identify personal possessions belonging to the predecessor and recognising people who had been close to him. Also, spiritual masters would be asked to verify the incarnation through divination. In Tibet there are also mediums who would predict from trance states.

**“In general, the term tulku refers to a particular aspect of the Buddha.” (Dalai Lama).** Within the Tibetan system of recognising Tulkus there are emanations who belong to the same mind-stream as the predecessor, emanations who are connected to others through the power of karma and prayers, and emanations who come as a result of blessings and appointment.

**“There are two ways in which someone can take rebirth after death: rebirth under the sway of karma and destructive emotions and rebirth through the power of compassion and prayer. Regarding the first, due to ignorance negative and positive karma are created and their imprints**

**remain on the consciousness. These are reactivated through craving and grasping, propelling us into the next life.” (H.H. 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama).**

Because of this, it is important to familiarise ourselves with **“virtue that at the time of death can be reactivated providing the means for them to take rebirth in a higher realm of existence.” Dalai Lama**

For the Bodhisattva however, it is a different story. They are *not born* through the force of their karma or destructive emotions **“They are able to choose their place and time of birth as well as their future parents. Such a rebirth, which is solely for the benefit of others, is rebirth through the force of compassion and prayer.” Dalai Lama**

In [Tibetan Buddhism](#) the nirmanakaya is envisioned as the manifestation of [enlightenment](#), in an infinite variety of forms and ways, in the physical world.

First, there are the Buddha manifestations, or the tulkus who appear to ordinary beings and serve them in infinite forms simultaneously through their fully enlightened power.

Second, there are the tulkus or the manifestations of highly accomplished adepts, who appear in many forms through the power of their highly realized wisdom.

Third, there are the rebirths, or tulkus, of virtuous or meritorious teachers, who are fulfilling their own spiritual goals and serving others through the beneficial effects of their virtuous deeds. Most of the tulkus of Tibet might belong to this third category, the rebirths of virtuous teachers or lamas.

Tibetans believe that buddhist masters will take rebirth after each of their deaths. In fact, all Buddhists trust that every being takes rebirth. And because we trust implicitly in karma, and believe that deceased lamas have accumulated virtuous karma, they will therefore obtain rebirths that enable them to continue to benefit others.

Tibetan buddhists believe that virtue, or “merit,” is the source of happiness and enlightenment, and that those who have attained this by leading virtuous lives will be sources of great benefit for many beings.

We also trust in the power of highly accomplished adepts to find the reborn manifestations of deceased lamas, because we trust in the power of highly realized **wisdom-mind**. Tibetan Buddhists enjoy full trust in the tulku tradition and their appreciation is based on the abundance of benefits received from the good merit of tulkus.

In most cases, a tulku is recognized by a highly realized lama before the tender **age of four or five. Not long after they are recognized**, their intensive training begins, and it can last for twenty years or more. They are generally educated under the watchful eyes of well-trained teachers in the best facilities available. Some tulkus are born with gifted qualities, but even if they are not, the chances of their becoming highly skilled teachers are very high because of the special attention and training they receive.

Since, the purpose of reincarnation is to continue and accomplish unfinished works, this can be done by appointing someone else as a Tulku. Also, it is possible that in rare cases, one person has several reincarnations like the emanations of the mind, speech and body.

There is the tulku who incarnates before the previous incarnation has died, several months or even years earlier. And then there is what's called a **"blessed tulku,"** in which the previous person chooses the person who is closest to him or blesses some passing Bodhisattva who hasn't quite attained the highest of the bhumis. ( **Bhumis are the 10 levels or stages of realisation for the enlightened bodhisattva**). And he takes certain types of energy, or spiritual energy, which transcends ego, and transfers it to the chosen person. So, there is a spiritual continuity which takes place.

The main purpose of this tulku training is not so that they can qualify for a successful career, but so that they grow into skilled teachers and public servants who will serve the monasteries or nunneries and the whole society.

The tulku system has offered unimaginable contributions to the spiritual, academic, and social world of Tibet. The imprints of the tulkus' lives — their writings, their teachings, and the institutions they have built — have become the main providers of education and spiritual civilization in Tibet, the Land of Snow, for centuries. This is perhaps waning due to the great cultural upheavals of the last 60 years.

To conclude, the path of Buddhism seeks to bring liberation from deluded mind states that are rooted in suffering. Any individual treading the Mahayana path of Buddhism has one reason and one reason only for liberation: to help liberate all other beings realise this state. For this reason, we can be filled with joy for one who courageously sets out on this path for

others. I cannot think of anything more inspiring than this. Just look at the life of the Dalai Lama and rejoice!

Finally, my hope for you all is that you tread a path that suits you. You will know it's right if you are developing the qualities of loving kindness and compassion based on contentment with whatever your life situation is. My heart felt wish is that you will all achieve this true happiness sooner rather than later. Thank you.