THE THREE WAYS - THERAVADA, GREAT WAY, DIAMOND WAY

The Buddha's teachings can be divided in different ways. This chapter deals with the most commonly used division into **Theravada (School of the [religious] elders), Great Way (Mahayana) and Diamond Way (Vajrayana)**, as it relates to different levels of development.

During his 45 years of teaching, Buddha gave explanations and advice to different people and advice on how to use their lives to eliminate difficulties and achieve lasting happiness. Since his statements always referred to the given situation and to the personal attitudes, preconditions and abilities of his and abilities of his disciples, the result is a very diverse and comprehensive collection of of Buddhist teachings.
Although Buddha never himself subdivided, several paths or "vehicles" for spiritual development emerged, each with different approaches and methods in the foreground.
Among the usual divisions into two, three or even nine paths, the three-way division presented here in Theravada, the Great Way and the Diamond Way refers primarily to the emphasis that is placed on the meditation practice. They are never opposites, but different approaches, which complement each other and build on each other.

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In **Theravada**, the focus of the practice is on meaningful external behavior and the avoidance of painful situations, which is often associated with monasticism, but lay people are increasingly following this path. In the long run thus more and more pleasant feedback experiences. Supported by calming meditations and connected with the insight that the basis of all difficulties - the "I" or "self" - has no independent existence, the goal of this path is liberation from all suffering. An Arhat (skt.) or "enemy conqueror" is therefore someone who has realized this state of tranquility by eliminating all spiritual and mental tendencies that make him cling to the idea of an independent ego.

For people who practice the **Great Way**, the development of wisdom, active love and compassion, it is about making life more meaningful and richer for others and oneself.
This path emphasizes the underlying motivation for all behavior, for lay people as well as for nuns and monks. The methods are aimed at perfecting one's abilities in order to benefit all beings in the best possible way. The ultimate goal of this path is Buddhahood, in which all spiritual qualities are brought to full maturity.

The **Diamond Way** especially attracts people who have a fundamental confidence in their own Buddha nature and that of all beings. Here the main thing is to cultivate the view that all the enlightened qualities (such as fearlessness, joy, active compassion), are already inherent in every being and that the different kinds of wisdom are present in the mind. One removes all veils, that prevent one from experiencing this. As a realizer (formerly often referred to by the exotic term “yogi”), one trains oneself to experience everything at the highest and purest level possible, thereby discovering the richness inherent in every situation. Ultimately, through identification with one's own Buddha nature, all spiritual veils are removed and one reaches the goal - full Buddhahood or Enlightenment.

Before Buddhism spread to various parts of the world, the Diamond Way was only practiced in its complete form in Tibet and its neighboring countries, but some aspects of it were also practiced in Chan Buddhism in China and in Japanese Zen.
The Great Way was practiced in the northern countries of Buddhism, that is, in the Himalayan countries with Tibet, Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan as well as Mongolia, China, Japan, Vietnam, Taiwan and Korea.
The tradition of Theravada (Pali: way of the elders) was mainly followed in the southern countries of Buddhism, such as Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.