

Vajrasattva and the Elements practice: an affinity

When approaching vipasyana practice a lot of people like a bare bones approach. They think, This is not about special states of mind. Practice becomes mostly just sitting, or just mindfulness, walking and sitting. In some cases, no meditation at all. Just insight inquiry applied to experience and that's it. I have been in that approach a bit, and I don't think there's anything wrong with that. But on the whole what works for me is a more rounded approach.

Especially, I found that sadhana practice helps me. Why, I'm not totally sure but I think it may have something to do with it taking me into a realm that is beyond what I can imagine and control. There is a degree of imagination obviously to set up any sadhana, but the actual experience I find is one of pure openness—openness to something unknown—and I think this helps. Its best I think if you don't bring wrong views into the sadhana about propitiating a deity, or views of self. But that completely non rational, beyond life and death aspect helps me. In a strange way gives a perspective. Sometimes if you don't know where you are going, you go further.

So anyway I like to have some kind of yidam figure in the background. And for the six elements practice I think there's a lot of affinity with Vajrasattva. Of course it works with all the yidams because essentially they are all the same, they all represent the same awakening. And of course the classic form of practice in Triratna is shamatha, six elements and sadhana.

But there is something about vajrasattva that is somehow extra essential.

I think maybe that's because at least historically, Vajrasattva is a Tantric figure which means he is specifically about awakening being innate or immanent, that is, we are beings whose very nature is about awakening.

That's why there's a lot in the practice about accepting our nature, especially the nature of the body. The body is something human beings tend to find impure, imperfect, disgusting, etc. We have all those problems with our body image. And added to that, there is all that reflection in the Bodhicaryavatara, a Mahayana text, about the body being like a bag of poo —or a bag of pus. But Vajrasattva has a very different take. The Body is not at all impure - it is something precious, amazing, like crystal and diamond. So there I think that right there is one important connection with the elements. In the symbol of the Vajra, the samsara of our five skandhas is transformed into the Nirvana of the five Buddhas or the five wisdoms.

So in another specifically Tantric teaching, there is an emphasis on the affinity between each skandha and each wisdom. Between the skandha of vedana, feeling, for example and the wisdom of Equality. So awakening becomes something we already have at least a bit of, if we could only appreciate what we have. Vajrasattva is all about this kind of thing, as I said, because it celebrates our innate capacity for awakening.

The purification of Vajrasattva happens as we accept and turn towards the obstacles we find in us, to awakening. They are experienced in the body as awkwardness, reluctance, clingings, aversions, wishings to ignore or dismiss or sideline whatever is getting in the way. The light from the seed syllable HUM penetrates right down through the central channel to all the different parts until the entire body is filled with clear nectar light, and in the process all obstacles that are felt as reluctances and awkwardnesses etc. are removed from the body like black gunk that is excreted through the pores and falls and is swallowed up by the all accommodating earth. The body fills with vajra light, we see all beings all around being also purified by this light, and eventually we all become

Vajrasattva, because Vajrasattva has always been our nature.

There is something of a parallel with the elements practice. I can connect the two at least. The obstacles experienced in the body are elemental - they are tactile experiences of earth and water and fire and wind. The elements practice sooner or later becomes a similar kind of purification, as we keep letting go the clinging and aversion and ignore-ance we find in our relationship with our body. In this way we are engaging in a deep purification especially in our view of what we are and what our existence is about. We must let go clinging to the elements at death, because that has always been their nature, letting go into a much more liberated, open eyed and fearless set of attitudes. Because we are by nature beings whose nature is awakening, and this is revealed through the elements practice, just as it is revealed through the Vajrasattva practice.