

Vajrasattva Shrine Teaching: On Buddhanature

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The following are excerpts from spontaneous teachings Rinpoche gave while sitting in the Vajrasattva shrine at his residence in Half Moon Bay one afternoon during the 2021 Vajrasattva Retreat.

❁ To practice really means to have interest in your buddhanature, the essence of all buddhas, which everybody possesses. If you have pure faith and interest in that, your practice can function!

❁ Thinking your practice is 'good' or 'bad' is just your mind. Instead of focusing on that, just have faith, trust, and interest in the practice.

❁ We always think, “I support the temple.” Yes, that's true. But it also supports you. A temple is a place that supports you in connecting to your buddhanature. Not just you—it supports everyone equally. It doesn't support only some people but not others.

❁ What are you practicing? Everybody wants to say, “I am practicing dzogchen!” Actually, dzogchen means understanding what is already your own—your buddhanature. It means understanding that nature is the nature of everything, and therefore nothing is higher or lower.

❁ Real high lamas such as His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche, His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse, and others, are called 'high,' but not because their nature is higher than ours. All the greatest lamas still have the same buddhanature as you. They are called 'high' because they have really practiced and been liberated by recognizing that nature. We didn't! What did we practice? We say we are practicing Vajrasattva, but we don't really know anything. We just think it's fun! Actually, Vajrasattva is all the buddhas' nature—their heart, their essence. Actually, that is just yourself.

❁ We need to learn and practice. What are you learning? Are you learning about somebody else? No, no. You are learning about yourself! You are learning about what you possess—your buddhanature. What kind is it? Is it a yellow one? A red one? A blue one? A square one? A sharp one? No. It has nothing to do with those kinds of things. Your buddhanature is the same as everyone else's. It is not material. Buddha is buddha. Take an interest in learning about that.

❁ Vajrasattva is up there on the shrine. What is he made of? Metal? Is it some special metal? No. Just metal. The same metal you can find anywhere. In the same way, you are a human being like all other human beings—we are all the same human beings with the same buddhanature. You need to know how to respect each other. Every being's buddhanature is the same; therefore, all the buddhas are the same, too. One can say all material things are equal in

being material, or all wooden things are equal in being made of wood. You can have faith in that quality being equal in all of them. Buddhanature is like that. What would be the benefit of calling this part low or that part high?

❁ Vajrasattva doesn't say "I love you" or "I hate you." If you prostrate to him, he doesn't thank you. If you don't prostrate to him, he doesn't dislike you. If you don't do his practice, he doesn't say, "Hey! You forgot me! Why?" No. He is the purity and evenness of all phenomena. He doesn't have that kind of trip.

❁ Your buddhanature is the same as all buddhas' nature; it is the same as the highest lamas' buddhanature, and it is the same as every ordinary being's buddhanature, too. Ordinary beings all have the same buddhanature, but each person's understanding of that nature is different. What they have learned of their nature, how much they have understood and have recognized it, whether or not they know how to connect to that nature and make use of it—each being is different in these ways. In a big school, among the many children, some listen and study well, and some are naughty or dumb-dumb. Like me! I'm really dumb-dumb. Sometimes one student looks naughty and another looks okay, but who knows, really? Some have karma from the past and can recognize their nature more easily. Some can understand quickly, like my younger sister who instantly understood anything anybody said. Some are like my older sister, who was more stubborn and not as quick. I was the worst, the dumbest, but people kept putting me in a high position.

Based on our past actions, our merit is different. Some might have great intelligence, or great faith, or great wealth, or other kinds of qualities; others might lack those qualities or just be troublemakers. Whether or not they have accumulated virtue and purified their negativity will determine their karmic situation. However much you have purified your negativity, you will be clean. You will be able to understand and practice clearly. Having cleansed some obscuration from your mind, you will have more wisdom. In a similar way, the more merit you have accumulated, the nicer your body, speech, and mind will be. However, the merit doesn't make your buddhanature better, and the negativity doesn't make it worse.

❁ Karma is a trap. Each human being has their own trap. You think your trap is more pretty than other people's? Uh-oh! Maybe some lady thinks her trap is more pretty and more trustable than yours! Well, I think mine is best because I am a tulku! A lama! Hoho! That way I embarrass myself.

In one way, the idea of being a 'tulku' is important, yes, absolutely. But how you learn and how you keep your discipline is more important. That is how you get the essence of what your teachers are teaching—not by having everyone spoil you because you have a big name! What is crucial is whether you understand the teaching or not, whether you follow it or not, whether you match your actions to the instructions or not—not whether you just have the name 'tulku.'

❁ For every sentient being, the bottom line is, trust your own buddhanature. Everybody has it, but we don't care about that precious one. We care about doing things our own way. We don't want to follow Hinayana or Mahayana nicely—just forget about Vajrayana! Then we don't have any yana, any vehicle, any genuine teaching or lineage. If you want to follow real Hinayana, have more discipline. If you want to follow real Mahayana, have more open compassion. If you have these two, then your Vajrayana practice is more clean. Following real Vajrayana means having faith. Start to practice those three things—discipline, compassion, and faith—slightly, little by little, if you want to truly follow those three vehicle teachings.

Actually, these three have the same nature, which you will see for yourself as you understand more deeply. There can be a thousand students studying at the same school with the same teacher, but they will each have a different understanding. Buddhism is like that, with its many vehicles whose nature is all the same. So, go further and further into the teachings; let your understanding become deeper and deeper. When you understand completely, purely, then we call that dzogchen. That “dzog” means complete, understanding everything, and “chen” means great.

