

***By Video Call to Ojai, Part 1:  
On Deity Practice***

Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche  
December 11th, 2016

*On December 11th, 2016, Rinpoche video-called the Ojai sangha when they were gathered for their weekly ngondro practice, and in the course of his conversation with the sangha gave the following practice advice:*

Everybody slowly, slowly, surely, surely practice. OM BENZAR SATTO HUNG, or OM MANI PEDME HUNG, or OM AH HUNG BENZAR GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG. Step by step, everybody practice. Focus on what you practice. When you say OM BENZAR SATTO HUNG, the visualization is that you are Vajrasattva. Not just your boyfriend, do you understand?

Oh, you guys are taking good care of the Guru Rinpoche statue! Good! And people are coming there still. Thank you, thank you. That means you guys need to practice, slowly. When you practice, you have to practice with mindfulness and with focus. Without any focus, without any thought, there is no way you can accomplish the dharma. And what should your thoughts be of? What should your focus be on? Enlightened qualities—qualities of enlightened body, enlightened speech, enlightened mind, and enlightened activities. You do know, you have heard teachings on these amazing, inconceivable qualities of the enlightened nature. So, practice with your focus on that. Practice mindfully. And, among yourselves, always keep good discipline and always keep harmony as much as you can. This is so good, really, thank you, I am so happy. Still all of you are there in Ojai, still you have a place there— that is wonderful. I thought it had all just dried up!

So you are practicing. Whatever you are practicing, you have the supports for that practice there. Look! You have thangkas, you have this wonderful statue. You can practice, relying on those. Those can be your support for practice. Those are forms—those are the expressions of enlightened form. When you practice, you should be focusing on the qualities of enlightened form or enlightened body, as well as enlightened speech, enlightened mind, enlightened qualities, and enlightened activities. These qualities of the enlightened nature are inconceivable. They are all there. They are all present. You can read in Guru Rinpoche’s life story, for example, to learn about his qualities—or now they are even making movies of it and you can look and see for yourself. What were Guru Rinpoche’s inconceivable qualities? What qualities did he express over the course of his life, performing amazing, miraculous deeds? Your Guru

Rinpoche statue there, that is just the same. Guru Rinpoche is Guru Rinpoche, all of the qualities are there.

If you understand the nature of Guru Rinpoche, then you see that all buddhas are actually there. Your Guru Rinpoche is inseparable from all buddhas. This is the kind of understanding that comes through deepening and broadening your basic understanding of dharma itself: understanding the inseparable nature. It is very good to have this kind of understanding. With this understanding, you know that Guru Rinpoche is not something distinct or different from other buddhas. Guru Rinpoche encompasses all buddhas. Guru Rinpoche encompasses all expressions of the lama, of the yidam, of the dakini, and of the dharma protectors. All are encompassed in Guru Rinpoche.

There is nothing beyond Guru Rinpoche. When you are there practicing, praying to Guru Rinpoche, bring to mind whatever you know and understand of his qualities of enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities. They are there. Not only his, but all buddhas', because they are inseparable. There is nothing different.

Now, let's say you start doing Vajrasattva practice instead. You might think, "Hey, what happened to Guru Rinpoche? Now I am practicing Vajrasattva!" Don't worry, it is the same. Vajrasattva, Guru Rinpoche, whatever deity it is that you are practicing, these are different expressions manifesting in order to bring benefit to sentient beings. These are the inconceivable manifestations of the buddhas, and they are countless in number. They can manifest in myriad forms. They can manifest as anything, anywhere, any form taking any shape. But, when you focus upon whatever deity or whatever form it is that you are practicing, focus single-pointedly—focus single-pointedly upon the one nature of all those enlightened forms. Then, your practice will be very good.

Vajrasattva, Guru Rinpoche, or any deity, when you focus upon their form, know what it is: It is an enlightened form. It is the enlightened nature itself manifesting as a shape, manifesting as a form, manifesting as an enlightened body. Then when you are visualizing yourself as Vajrasattva or as Guru Rinpoche, don't think that you are pretending that you are someone else, or that suddenly you have a different body. When you visualize yourself in the form of the deity, you aren't pretending anything. You are recognizing the true nature of your body as enlightened body. That is extremely good, because in this way you are familiarizing and habituating yourself not just to seeing ordinary form but to seeing the nature of ordinary form as enlightened form. This is how we train in pure vision. The nature of all that appears is enlightened form. Enlightened form is the very nature of any appearance. That means *anything* that we see.

When you come there and gather in a group to practice and you look around the room, don't think, "Here I am seeing a bunch of old guys and old ladies." No, no. You should look around the room and think, "Here are enlightened forms." If you are practicing Vajrasattva, they are all Vajrasattva. If you are practicing Guru Rinpoche, they are all Guru Rinpoche. If you are practicing Tara, they are all Tara. If you are practicing Amitabha, they are all Amitabha. There is no difference. What we call deities are expressions or embodiments of wisdom nature, which is the same as buddhanature, the nature of each being. What we call the deities' bodies are the embodiments of the qualities of enlightened form, which is the nature of all form. Their nature is the same. There is no difference in their nature.

It is the same with speech. Actually, the nature of all that we perceive as ordinary sound is enlightened speech—Vajrasattva's enlightened speech, Guru Rinpoche's enlightened speech, any buddha's enlightened speech. What we perceive as ordinary sound, there is no ordinary sound there. There is only the enlightened speech of all buddhas. We can think of it as the enlightened speech of Vajrasattva, or the enlightened speech of Guru Rinpoche, it makes absolutely no difference. The important thing is to know that its nature is enlightened speech. That should be our focus.

And enlightened mind is the same thing. Whenever you have enlightened body and enlightened speech, of course then you also have enlightened mind, because these three are also inseparable. Enlightened body, enlightened speech, and enlightened mind: They are not three separate things. They are one thing. They are one nature. If you are practicing Vajrasattva, Vajrasattva himself is the nature of enlightened mind. Vajrasattva's enlightened mind is the enlightened mind of all buddhas. Vajrasattva particularly is said to be the deity who is the embodiment of the enlightened mind qualities of all buddhas. So, when you practice Vajrasattva, there is this particular, special connection with enlightened mind. But, when you practice any deity, the qualities of enlightened mind are all fully present there. Any deity that you practice, all qualities of enlightened body are encompassed in that deity. All qualities of enlightened speech are encompassed in that deity. All qualities of enlightened mind are encompassed in that deity, expressing themselves as that particular deity in order to bring inconceivable benefit to sentient beings.

This expression happens completely spontaneously, completely naturally, completely effortlessly. The deities and the buddhas, they don't make any kind of effort or think, "Now I am going to manifest in such-and-such a way in order to benefit these beings." It is not like that. It is completely natural, completely effortless, completely spontaneous, this expression of enlightened nature as every single deity, every single

enlightened form. That is why we can have perfect faith in each and every one of them—they are each equally expressions of the same source.

These expressions of the enlightened nature are perfectly effortless, just like the sun shines in every direction at once. You don't need separate suns, one to shine in the south, one to shine in the west, one to shine in the east. You don't need a separate sun to shine in each direction. In the same way, you don't need a separate buddhanature or a separate enlightened nature behind each and every deity. The source or nature of all deities? It is that one enlightened nature. Therefore, you can have faith in every deity. Each and every deity completely and perfectly embodies all qualities of enlightened body, enlightened speech, enlightened mind, enlightened qualities, and enlightened activities.

For example, start by saying Guru Rinpoche embodies the qualities of enlightened body. Well, where there is enlightened body, there is enlightened speech—they are inseparable. Where there is enlightened speech, there is enlightened mind—there couldn't not be. Where there is enlightened mind, there are enlightened qualities. Where there are enlightened qualities, there are enlightened activities. There is no way that this could not be so. There is no difference in the nature of these five qualities. So there is no way that Guru Rinpoche could fail to embody them all.

You don't need to think: "Now wait a second, you put Tara in there with all those guys, but she is a lady and they are all men, and how does that work?" No, no, no. You don't need to think like that. When we are speaking of the enlightened nature of buddhahood itself, there is no distinction between male and female. There is no distinction of high or low. There is no discernment between any kind of hierarchy. There are no distinctions made in terms of that nature. That nature is neither male nor female, and so it can express itself as either. That nature is neither high or low, nor any particular color, nor any particular shape. It is not confined in any way, as our ordinary conceptual mind is confined. Being utterly beyond that, then there is no need for any such projection or differentiation. All expressions or manifestations of it are possible without any contradiction.

Outerly it is enlightened; innerly it is enlightened; secretly it is enlightened. Outerly it is buddha. Innerly it is buddha. Secretly it is buddha. There is no need to make any kind of distinction, saying this part is male, this part is female, or saying it is only this or it is only that. All of that is ordinary thought, ordinary conceptualization, and it absolutely does not apply in the context of the enlightened nature.

We can say outer, inner, and secret, sure. When we talk about outer, or the outer qualities of buddha, that refers to enlightened body; the inner qualities, to enlightened

speech; the secret qualities, to enlightened mind. These inconceivable qualities and activities are expressing themselves spontaneously and effortlessly everywhere in order to benefit all beings. Outer, inner, and secret are inseparable, all one inseparable nature, not bound into ordinary thinking like our ordinary minds. So if you are practicing Vajrasattva, you can have perfect confidence, perfect faith, that all qualities of enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities of all buddhas are encompassed in that. You are praying to all those qualities at once. You are invoking all of those qualities at once. All of those qualities have the very same nature. With that kind of understanding, then practice. Whatever understanding of that you have, you muster that forth, you call that up, you invoke that understanding, and then you practice.

When we say buddha, such as “I take refuge in Buddha,” we are not just talking about one. Buddha, buddhahood, the enlightened nature—it is inconceivable. When you come as a group and you are all doing one practice, for example if you are all generating a visualization of Vajrasattva, you are all Vajrasattva there. The house or building where you are practicing, that is Vajrasattva’s palace. Whatever sounds you hear during that time, that is Vajrasattva’s speech, and whatever arises in your mind—whatever thoughts, concepts, memories, ideas, emotions, whatever the case may be—that is Vajrasattva’s enlightened mind. That is what we should try to remember as we practice. All of the buddhas’ enlightened body, speech, and mind, they are embodied as Guru Rinpoche, as Vajrasattva, as Tara, as whatever deity it is that we are practicing. That is what we should think and focus upon every time we practice.

*(to be continued...)*