

# Deity Yoga

## *Citing Sources*

This section has two parts: how the method is explained in the texts of Highest Yoga and in those of the lower tantras.

### *How the Method is Explained in the Texts of Highest Yoga*

This section has two parts: how the method is explained in tantras and in commentaries.

### *How the Method is Explained in Highest Yoga Tantras*

The first chapter of the *Vajrapañjara Tantra* (*Vajrapañjara*)<sup>35</sup> expresses the method clearly:

If emptiness were the method, then  
Buddhahood could not be. Since other  
Than this cause there would be no other fruit,  
The method is not emptiness.

The Conquerors teach emptiness  
To overcome the conceptions of self  
In those who from [right] views have turned away  
And in those who seek the view of self.

Therefore it is the 'circle of a mandala',  
It is a binding of the blissful method.  
Through the yoga of Buddha pride  
Buddhahood will not be distant.

A Teacher has the two and thirty signs  
As well as all the eighty minor marks,  
Therefore the method of achievement  
Is to take on the Teacher's form.

One by one these four stanzas (1) refute the assertion that merely meditating on emptiness is the method, and indicate (2) the purpose of teaching emptiness, (3) the uncommon method and its greatness, and (4) the reason why Buddhahood is achieved through this method.

The first stanza means: It was taught earlier in the *Vajrapanjara* that, since the mind is polluted with the taints of one's own thoughts, one should make every effort to purify it. Then one might think, 'To cleanse these taints, one should meditate only on emptiness because the wisdom cognising the suchness of selflessness is opposed to thoughts conceiving self [inherent existence] whereas other paths do not contradict these thoughts. Therefore, the method for developing into a Buddha is only meditation on emptiness. Of what use are other elaborations?'

It is said that no matter how hard one works at such a method, one cannot become a Buddha. For, except a cause which is a meditation on emptiness, there would be no method [to achieve] the fruit [of Buddhahood]; since the branch of method would be lacking, the causes would not be complete. Thus, to gain familiarity only with emptiness is not a complete method. Devakulamahamati's explanation<sup>36</sup> is good, that this is the system not only of Mantra but also of the Perfection Vehicle.

*Question:* Then what is the purpose of teaching emptiness?

*Answer:* Emptiness, or selflessness, was taught for the sake of overcoming the two conceptions of self in those who have turned away from the views of the selflessness of phenomena and so forth and in those who seek the view of a self [of persons] in the sense that they strongly adhere to a conception of it. This shows that in order to cleanse the taints of thoughts of the two types of self [inherent existence both of persons and of phenomena] one

definitely must seek and cultivate a viewing consciousness cognising suchness—selflessness.

It is similarly taught in the Perfection Vehicle that meditation only on emptiness is insufficient and that its purpose is to cleanse the mind. This explanation of the two lines 'In those who from [right] views have turned away/ And in those who seek the view of self,' accords with the thought of Devakulamahamati's commentary on the *Vajrapanjara*.

*Question:* If mere meditation on emptiness is not a complete method, what is the special one?

*Answer:* Because mere meditation on emptiness is not feasible as the method, the special one is 'the circle of a mandala' [a 'resident mandala' which is a divine body and a 'residence mandala' which is the deity's abode]. This is how the stanzas should be connected.

In Devakulamahamati's commentary to the *Vajrapanjara*<sup>37</sup> the next line is translated [into Tibetan] as 'The method is a blissful binding.' This is a better translation than the one given above, 'It is a binding of the blissful method'. Here, a method superior to that of the Perfection Vehicle is being indicated, and it has been shown that mere meditation on emptiness is not a complete method. Thus, there is a method to be added to meditation on emptiness, and it is said to be deity yoga. Thereby, meditation on a mandala circle [divine resident and residence] is known to be the main method for [achieving] a Form Body.

The features of this method are two, blissfulness and binding. Blissfulness is non-dependence on asceticism. Many modes of binding are put forth in the *Hevajra Tantra*, but at this point binding should be understood as an indivisibility of method—the appearance of a divine circle—and wisdom—cognition of the emptiness of inherent existence.

With such a yoga of method and wisdom in which one cultivates the pride of a Buddha such as Vairochana, one attains the state of a Buddha without the passage of a long time as in the Perfection Vehicle. In this way the greatness of the Mantra path is presented. The explanation that deity yoga is the quick path refutes wrong ideas that deity yoga is useless for achieving the supreme.

*Question:* Why is it that in order to achieve a Form Body one needs a yoga bearing the pride of a Buddha and the aspect of a mandala circle?

*Answer:* The *Vajrapanjara* says:

A Teacher has the two and thirty signs  
As well as all the eighty minor marks,  
Therefore the method of achievement  
Is to take on the Teacher's form.

Taking as the reason that a Form Body—the object of attainment—is adorned with the major and minor marks, it is said that the fruit must be achieved through a method which has the form or aspect of a Teacher.

In the other two commentaries on the *Vajrapanjara* [by Krshnapada<sup>38</sup> and by Indrabodhi<sup>39</sup>] it does not appear that doubts are eradicated and that the topic is clearly explained, but such is done in Devakulamahamati's commentary<sup>40</sup> [even though not all of it is correct]. In his commentary on the first stanza, at the point of refuting that mere meditation on emptiness is the method, he explains that if one cultivated only an emptiness lacking method, one would be born in an unfortunate existence such as in Limitless Space. This is not correct [because one would become a Hinayana Foe Destroyer].

Then, in answer to the theory that at the time of the path emptiness is the method and at the time of maturation

emptiness is the fruit, Devakulamahamati explains that since the emptiness both of the cause or path and of the effect or maturation would have no other distinctive features, emptiness—while it was being asserted as the effect—could not also be the method. He adds that since the cause is an elaborative entity involving apprehension [of inherent existence] and the effect is the opposite, the cause and the effect are different; therefore, the method is not just emptiness.

His explanation of the purpose for teaching emptiness is the same as that given above. Then, there is the doubt 'If it is taught in the Perfection Vehicle that enlightenment is achieved through the practice—for three countless aeons—of the perfection of wisdom conjoined with the other five perfections, what is the use of methods such as a mandala circle?' To eliminate this doubt Devakulamahamati explains the blissfulness in the third stanza as it was above. He says that 'binding' is to experience the bliss of the union of the two organs [which is limited to Highest Yoga Tantra]. The 'pride of being a Buddha' he [correctly] explains as being free from the pride of ordinariness, and 'not be distant' he explains as attaining Buddhahood in this life [but this is also limited to Highest Yoga Tantra].

One might think that a Buddha Body is to be cultivated in the mode of a Truth Body [in meditative equipoise on emptiness alone]. The last stanza eliminates this qualm; Devakulamahamati explains that the method is the three meditative stabilisations in the form of the Three Bodies.

Many Tibetan lamas have [wrongly] applied the teaching of deity yoga—a mandala circle—only to the first stage of Highest Yoga Tantra [that of generation]. This has the fault of not discriminating between the respective greater and lesser extent of deity yoga [which occurs in the three lower tantras and both stages of Highest Yoga] and the stage of generation [which occurs only in Highest

Yoga and is the first of two stages]. Deity yoga should be taken as applicable to both stages [generation and completion].

This conception that meditation on emptiness is the only means for achieving both Bodies is the greater basis of wrong ideas that omit deity yoga as a method for the supreme achievement [Buddhahood]. I have quoted the *Vajrapanjara* because it clearly eliminates this doubt and clearly says that deity yoga must be cultivated as a cause of a Form Body. Thus, with this as an illustration, the teachings of the other tantras should be understood. Fearing it would be too much, I will not cite them here.

*How the Method is Explained in Highest Yoga  
Commentaries*

This section has two parts: how the method is explained in the master Jnanapada's texts and then by other masters.

*How the Method is Explained in the Master  
Jnanapada's Texts*

The teacher Jnanapada sets forth a very clear exposition of what is taught in the tantra quoted above in his *Engaging in the Means of Self-Achievement (Ātmasādhānāvātāra)*. First he sets forth the way of the Perfection Vehicle,<sup>41</sup> saying:

If meditation on selflessness lacks the features of method, it cannot generate an omniscient wisdom free from all taints of thought and aiding all migrators. Therefore, one should work hard at a very clear method. For that which has a nature of helping all beings is an omniscient wisdom, and this help arises from the ultimate vastness, its cause being only the cultivation of method because cultivation of selflessness has the fruit

of only forsaking thought. Further, [Maitreya's *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras*] says:

Because of profundity and because of vastness  
These two [wisdom and method] are taught for the two,  
Non-conceptuality and full maturation,  
Therefore, they are the highest method of all.

Non-perverse activities of mind, such as giving and so forth, are the method because when they are thoroughly dedicated to omniscient wisdom they become the causes of complete enlightenment. [The *Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*] says:

Thoroughly dedicate to enlightenment giving,  
Ethics, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom.  
Hold not enlightenment to be supreme adhering  
To it as a mass.<sup>42</sup> Such is taught to beginners.

By this Jnanapada means: If one lacks the vast method, no matter how much one meditates on selflessness, one cannot attain Buddhahood which sustains all migrators. Therefore, one must work hard at method. The state helping all sentient beings is the imprint [result] only of the vast method because the imprint of meditation on selflessness is an abandonment—only an extinguishing of taints.

This does not teach that through meditation on emptiness, without the vast method, one can extinguish all taints but cannot bring about the welfare of all sentient beings. Nor does it teach that through cultivating only the vast method without meditation on emptiness one can attain a Form Body that brings about the welfare of all sentient beings, but cannot attain a Truth Body—which is an extinguishment of all taints. For neither Body can be attained without the other. Since Truth and Form Bodies

have the definite relation of depending on one causal collection, they are never separated.

Moreover, the wisdom cognising emptiness, which is impelled by the precious aspiration to enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, purifies all the taints of conceiving self. Therefore, this wisdom is the special cause of a Truth Body that possesses the two purities [natural purity and purity from adventitious stains]. However, the wisdom cognising emptiness is also a co-operative cause of a Form Body.

Similarly, the vast methods are the special causes of a Form Body but also the co-operative causes of a Truth Body. For, if one does not work hard at these methods, no matter how much one meditates on the suchness of phenomena, one can only leave cyclic existence and cannot arrive at a Truth Body which is an extinguishment of all taints. Also, if one does not strive for the wisdom cognising emptiness, no matter how much one works at these methods, one cannot arrive at a Form Body.

Nevertheless, the extinguishment of all taints upon becoming a Buddha must be taken as an imprint of having meditated on emptiness, whereas becoming the sustenance of all migrators must be taken as the imprint of the vast methods. For example, since all three conditions must be present to produce an eye consciousness apprehending blue, that consciousness is an effect of all three. However, its apprehension of a visible form and not other objects, such as sounds, is an imprint of the eye sense. Its being generated as an experiential entity is the imprint of the 'immediately preceding condition' [a former moment of consciousness]. Its being generated in the image of blue is the imprint of the object.

The quote from Maitreya's *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* [on page 123] is a source showing that if both factors of method and wisdom are complete, they are the unsurpassed method for achieving the fruit. The quote

from the *Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* [on page 123] is a source showing that if the methods for achieving Buddhahood—giving and so forth—are dedicated to enlightenment and conjoined with the wisdom of non-apprehension [of inherent existence], they become [actual] methods [capable of causing attainment of Buddhahood].

After that, Jnanapada sets forth the special method of the Mantra Vehicle:<sup>43</sup> 'That is not so in fact because aside from cultivating different causes there is no meditation that accords with actualised complete enlightenment.' This means that giving and so forth, which in the Perfection Vehicle are explained as the method, are not the unsurpassed or highest method because they lack the meditation that accords in aspect with an actualised Buddha Body. For in the Perfection Vehicle one only cultivates paths completely different in aspect from the fruit [of a Form Body].

Jnanapada proves that if [a system] has no cultivation of a path that accords in aspect with a Form Body, it is not an unsurpassed method for achieving Buddhahood. He says,<sup>44</sup> 'The fruits that by their own entity have a nature of profundity and vastness are achieved from their own nature.'

Thus, in general the fruits to be attained are a Truth Body with a nature of profundity and [a Form Body] adorned with the major and minor marks with a nature of vastness. Further, the wisdom mind abides as one taste with the suchness of phenomena and never rises from it, while the body, adorned with the flaming major and minor marks, abides without ever changing. These two are undifferentiable in one entity; this is the meaning of 'by their own entity'. Thus, the method and wisdom that achieve such [results] must accord with them. For example, when [practising to] achieve the mind of a Conqueror—a Truth Body—a yogi places his mind now in

the suchness of phenomena and cultivates a path that accords in aspect with the mind of a Conqueror. In the same way, when [practising to] achieve a Form Body, a yogi must cultivate a path that accords in aspect with that Body in the sense that his own body appears to have the major and minor marks. For, a Truth and a Form Body are thoroughly similar in the sense that if the one path of similar aspect is practised, the other should be practised, and if the one is omitted, the other should be omitted.

Thinking of this, Jnanapada says in his *Self-Achievement*,<sup>45</sup> 'Therefore, as in the case with selflessness one should meditate on the nature of vastness in the mode of non-difference.' The vastness of this system is deity yoga; I will explain later [in the section on Highest Yoga Tantra] how it is vast. Achievement through such means is called 'achievement from their own nature'.

At the time of the fruit, the base—a body adorned with the major and minor marks—and the mind of non-apprehension [of inherent existence] which depends on it abide at one time as an undifferentiable entity. In the same way, at the time of the path, the method is that the yogi's body appears to his own mind in the aspect of a Tathagata's body, and at the same time his mind becomes the wisdom apprehending suchness—the non-inherent existence of all phenomena. These two are a simultaneous composite, undifferentiable in the entity of one consciousness. This should be understood as [the meaning of] undifferentiable method and wisdom [in the Mantra Vehicle]. Through cultivating the yoga of joining these two at the same time one attains the state in which non-dualistic wisdom itself appears as Form Bodies to trainees.

If the supreme method—the appearance of a deity—is devoid of wisdom and bereft of the unmistakable cognition of the nature of one's own mind, one cannot progress to Buddhahood. Therefore, it is necessary to have a

composite of the two. Jnanapada's *Self-Achievement*<sup>46</sup> says, 'Since a Subduer having immeasurable effulgence of light serves as a source of limitless marvels for oneself and others, even if this which has the character of being the supreme right method were manifestly cultivated but bereft of wisdom, it would not be a means of achieving all marvels; therefore, the nature [of the divine body] should be known without mistake'.

The wisdom cognising non-inherent existence and appearing in the aspect of a deity is itself one entity with the mind of deity yoga, the vast. However, method and wisdom are presented as different by force of the convention of different opposites of negatives in dependence on the fact that their opposites are different. Wisdom is established from the viewpoint of being the opposite of a mind that mistakenly conceives the meaning of suchness. For knowledge of the ultimate [emptiness]—the final object of knowledge—is the supreme knowledge. Method is established from the viewpoint of being the opposite of that which does not have the capacity of achieving its fruit, Buddhahood. For the methods of Buddhahood are capable of achieving that state. In this way Jnanapada's *Self-Achievement*<sup>47</sup> says, 'Also, these [method and wisdom] are one nature in the unmistakable vast mind. Even so, the convention of difference causes one to understand that they are different. It is thus: Wisdom is known by way of its being an entity that is the opposite of a mind mistaken about suchness, and method is shown to be that which is the opposite of not being able to bear its respective fruit.' Even though Jnanapada describes the procedure of establishing method and wisdom in a general way, at this point the bases [he uses] for positing method and wisdom are the special method and wisdom of Mantra.

Thus, a Form Body is achieved through the appearance of the wisdom apprehending [emptiness] as a divine

**TANTRA IN TIBET**

mandala circle, and a Truth Body is achieved through the cognition of its nature—emptiness. One should know that joining such method and wisdom non-dualistically is the chief meaning of the method and wisdom and of the yogas set forth in the Mantra Vehicle.