

## Vajrakīlaya Q&A

[Question:] Why does one of Vajrakīlaya's vajras have nine spokes, while the other has five?

The nine-spoked vajra is a sign of his having traversed and mastered the nine vehicles of the path of the Secret Mantra Vajrayāna. There are three main levels, or vehicles, of the path—the Individual Liberation, the Bodhisattva, and the Vajrayāna—and each of these is further divided into three subdivisions, making for nine vehicles in all. Each vehicle denotes a further progression of our experience along the path; thus, having reached the highest pinnacle of the path, Vajrakīlaya has a nine-spoked vajra. But you should also ask Khenpo Tenzin about this.

The five-spoked vajra is a sign of the five buddha families and their consorts, so it is related to the five afflictive emotions that ripen into the five wisdoms. It is also related to the five elements of our bodies, but in general, the vajra represents the mind, wherein the five afflictive emotions are found. So, taken all together, on the outer level we have the five elements of the body; on the inner level we have the five afflictive emotions; and on the secret level we have the five wisdoms. So in summary, the five-spoked vajra is related to the five buddha families, while the nine-spoked vajra is related to the nine vehicles or stages of the path.

[Question:] If Amoghasiddhi is the crown ornament for Vajrakīlaya and the ten wrathful ones, why do the depictions of the field of merit on the thangkas always show a garuda above Vajrakīlaya's head? Why isn't Vajrasattva above his head?

The garuda is more like an outer ornament, or an outer sign, of the deity's wrathful ornamentation. For example, in the Yamāntaka Praise of Signs, it says that, on the outer level, the garuda is a sign that the deity has conquered the earth lords. Similarly, the eight charnel ground adornments and the glorious adornments of a wrathful deity also have symbolic outer meanings.

In terms of the activities of the five buddha families, their wrathful enlightened activity is mainly assigned to Amoghasiddhi. So Amoghasiddhi is the crown ornament, while the garuda is more of an outer ornament. There is probably also a deeper meaning to the garuda, but here it is Amoghasiddhi, who represents the wrathful enlightened activity.

[Question:] What does the mass of fire that he is holding in his hand represent?

The mass of fire that he holds is a sign of the primordial wisdom that burns away all karmic and saṃsāric imprints. Powerful thoughts and afflictive emotions all arise due to dualistic grasping, and here they are all burned away by this fire of wisdom awareness. And since they do not inherently exist, all feelings generated by such thoughts and afflictive emotions are also destroyed by the power of this awareness. In reality, there is no duality, so the mass of wisdom fire is a sign of wisdom awareness having burned away all of the afflictive emotions.

[Question:] In the fourteen root tantric downfalls, it says, “To conceptualize phenomena that are without names and labels is the eleventh.” What does this mean?

This means that on the ultimate level of reality, there is no duality. Still, we often conceptualize this ultimate reality: we analyze it conceptually in terms of how it does and does not exist. So even though ultimate reality has no names or labels, we still conceptualize it, and in doing so, we are conceptualizing something that is actually like space—and the dharmakāya is like space. And because ultimate reality transcends duality, all of our grasping toward it and all of our conceptually-biased thinking about it are all based on confusion. Conceptualizing ultimate reality in any way is confusion.

But since we are speaking here about the root downfalls, the most important downfall these days is the third, which is to get angry at a vajra brother or sister. This downfall is highly

neglected nowadays; people don't pay much attention to it. A vajra brother or sister, or a vajra sibling, is someone with whom we have received empowerment and with whom we are practicing the Secret Mantra; thus, such an individual is like our sibling from now until enlightenment is reached.

Whenever a transgression occurs between vajra siblings, it must be confessed and purified immediately. Often, people think: "I got angry; now I've lost that samaya." And we do break it by getting angry, of course, so we must confess the anger. Anger does arise; there is nothing we can do about it: it arises. But if it arises in the morning, we should be able to feel sorry for it, apologize for it, and confess it by that afternoon, by relying on the two truths and so forth. And through making our confession, no more grasping at the anger will remain within the mind. In any case, the anger needs to be laid aside.

[Question:] In the last paragraph on page seventeen, it says, "Within the heart of myself as the principal deity is Vajrakīlaya." Is this deity alone or in yab-yum aspect?

The wisdom being at the heart of yourself as Vajrakīlaya is without a consort. Actually, on the ultimate level, there is no male or female; it is only due to our ordinary thinking, our holding on to the reality of appearances, that things appear in a dualistic way. In reality, though, there is no duality, not even between a couple. Even though they appear separately as male and female, their mind is of a single basis. So this is what is represented here by the wisdom being at the heart.

When shown in the aspect of male and female in union, or yab and yum, the deity represents the mind's quality of clarity and emptiness in union. The male, or yab, represents clarity—the clear mind—while the female, or the yum, represents the mind's emptiness. So the crystal-clear awareness, which is the male, is empty, which is the female. In the Restoration section of the text, it says that the samaya with appearance—the father—is restored, and that the samaya with emptiness—the mother—is restored. And ultimately, this state of union between the yab and yum—this innate unity of clarity and emptiness—is a state of great bliss. This means that if you always remain within the clear and empty nature, there is really no suffering whatsoever.

However, until we realize the ultimate, we still speak about the relative and ultimate truth, so there is this union of emptiness and compassion. Therefore, in terms of whether or not you should visualize yourself with a consort, if the deity has a consort, you should also visualize the consort—but with the understanding that, ultimately, male and female, or yab and yum, are indivisible. So as long as we still have a dualistic perception, we visualize the yab with consort, but with the understanding that their basis of mind is one and the same. And in this way, for example, we see all males as Chenrezig—as the yab—and all females as the yum, the female principle. But we do this knowing that, ultimately, male and female do not exist. So even though all beings appear as male or female, when you realize the ultimate truth, the experience becomes non-dual: there is no more duality between male and female.

[Question:] For the mantra recitation at the top of page eighteen, there is a golden vajra with a HŪṂ at its center, and the HŪṂ is encircled by the mantra. Do the vajra, the HŪṂ, and the mantra all rotate, or is it just the mantra that rotates?

It is just the mantra garland that rotates, that spins. The HŪṂ and the golden vajra do not turn. So at the hub of the golden vajra is the HŪṂ, which is surrounded by the KĪLI KĪLAYA HŪṂ PHAṬ mantra, and this mantra is what rotates, not the HŪṂ or the vajra.

[Question:] The mantra is so small in this visualization. Does one need to visualize each mantra syllable clearly?

Here a beginning practitioner would focus more on a coarse visualization of the syllables. Over time, you can then begin slowly reducing the size of the visualization, making it more and more subtle, to the point that it eventually becomes non-conceptual—very, very subtle. But this happens naturally as your awareness becomes increasingly more clear: as your focus becomes

more and more sharp, the visualization just naturally becomes more and more subtle. And when the mind becomes extremely sharp, extremely clear, you will be able to visualize even the tiniest of syllables. Then the mind is so clear and the wisdom awareness so sharp that the visualization arises very clearly in an instant. But, of course, this is more difficult in the beginning.

Actually, scientists do something similar to this nowadays when they perform very subtle work. For instance, when they are producing a watch, their work becomes very fine, very detailed. Even though we often can't even see it with our eyes, they are still actually fabricating the watch with their hands. Their work is very fine, very small, and in this way, even this kind of scientific work has a quality of wisdom.

But for us, for now, in order to accomplish the visualization of the mantra, we need to approach the practice in stages, which is why we follow the four branches of the approach and accomplishment. To do so, you begin by first just visualizing the mantra syllables of the mantra garland. Once this visualization is stable, you then begin slowly rotating the mantra, accelerating the rotation over time, until the mantra is turning very fast. Lastly, you visualize light rays radiating out and gathering back.

Accomplishing all of this is something that requires intense and persistent practice over a long period of time. As you recite the mantra, you will need to focus single-pointedly on the mantra garland visualization. We have been accumulating karmic imprints within our mind since beginning-less time in saṃsāra, and we have habituated to them to the point that they are very thick. They can only be eradicated slowly, over time, through the training and practice of visualizing with single-pointed focus. Through such practice, the mind will become more and more clear, which is a sign of having purified obscurations. And in the end, after all obscurations have been purified, you can simply remain within the visualization, without even needing to meditate. This is what happens when you achieve a state of non-distraction. But until then, you need to habituate through training and practice to the visualization.

[Question:] What is the meaning of the term “life-force” in the Vajrakīlaya sādhana?

Life-force has both a relative aspect and an ultimate aspect. From a relative perspective, there is a life-force that endures for as long as we grasp at a duality between self and other. But from the ultimate perspective, the life-force is primordial wisdom. Here in the sādhana, toward the end of the lineage supplication, the life force is mentioned from the ultimate perspective, in the context of conquering the four māra-demons.

According to the lineage prayer, when you attain the life-force of immortality—that is, when you see the ultimate truth and you attain the state of the Buddha Vajradhara—you conquer the lord of death. But until this happens, you must hold the relative life-force—and on the relative level, everything is compounded and impermanent. The wisdom life-force, or the ultimate life-force, however, is attained when the mind reaches a state of continuous non-distraction, remaining clear at all times, day and night. When this natural clarity is attained, this means that you have realized the life-force on the ultimate level: the life force of primordial wisdom. And when you attain the life-force of primordial wisdom, you understand that the body is just like an old pair of clothing. You realize that the real life-force, the actual life-force, is the mind that transcends birth and death: the space-like mind. This is what is accomplished when you become entirely free of all dualistic grasping, and this is what we call the life-force that is primordial wisdom, or the ultimate life-force. But to accomplish this, first we need to realize the relative life-force, which is love and compassion, because if we do not first seize this relative life-force, it will be difficult to ever find the life-force of primordial wisdom.

But what is the relative life-force? What does it mean to retain the life-force of love and compassion? The relative life-force, primarily speaking, is the bond of love and compassion between vajra brothers and sisters. If we allow this bond to break, we must restore it right away. Ordinary people don't bother to repair the bond; they just sort of throw it away without confessing it each and every day. They don't recognize the preciousness of this bond of love, so they just discard it like they're throwing away a pair of old shoes. But, actually, we have taken the bodhisattva vow, and the main thing to recognize with the bodhisattva vow is that love is the

most precious thing. Therefore, I know that if I lose my love, I should immediately recognize it. I should go to that friend, apologize to him, and tell him, “Let’s not hold on to that.” And by doing this, you restore the vow. All of this is actually explained in the refuge vow, so you already learn this at the very beginning.

So you must not allow this bond of love to become broken. If you uphold the bond of love, the life-force of wisdom will arise along with it, which is why the bond of love is so precious. Wisdom arises together with love, and karma arises together with self-grasping: they belong together. Therefore, in order to attain the ultimate life-force of primordial wisdom, you first must cultivate relative bodhicitta, which is encompassed by the prayer: “From now on until enlightenment, I will apply my body, speech, and mind to virtue.” And this mostly refers to your companions, to those with whom you spend your time.

Thus, during the refuge vow, we learn that the one and only thing that we really need to take with us is love. This is really the whole purpose of the refuge vow—this and nothing else. So if you have love, eventually you will also seize the ultimate life-force, which is primordial wisdom. And then dualistic consciousness transforms into primordial wisdom.

[Question:] Could you please share more details about the meaning of the second mantra on page twenty-four?

Normally we think in terms of there being a separation between self and other: we think that there is the self, and then there is the other. But here, as you visualize the circulation of the mantra garland during the second mantra recitation, you realize that such a duality only exists in terms of bodies. The mind itself is non-dual; so here you realize that no actual division exists within the mind. Therefore, the afflictive emotions of self and others—as well as our aggregates, sense sources, and elements—are actually inseparable. They are one and the same; there is no division between us. And here, this inseparability is realized here through the union of the yab and yum, wherein ordinary thinking stops and the experience of great bliss arises.

When ordinary thinking stops and no more thoughts exist within the mind, you come to the actual, fundamental basis of the mind. The ultimate bliss of this experience is innate; it is your true nature. This is not the temporary pleasure of the bliss experienced on an outer level, which is related to the five sense objects, and is therefore contaminated. It is said that everything that is contaminated is ultimately the cause of suffering, so as long as you have it, there is bliss, but if you lose it, you suffer. But true bliss—the ultimate bliss that is your true nature—does not hinge upon any outer factors: is your true nature. And when you realize this nature, you experience a state of unchanging bliss, which is what is introduced here in this visualization. This is also related to the new tantric tradition practice of tummo, or the practice of the channels, winds, and drops, so the experience of tummo is being introduced here as well. Regardless, the experience here is that of the non-dual natural state of the mind itself, which is blissful by nature. We call it the “greatly blissful dharmakāya,” and this is what we are being introduced to here.

Earlier in the sādhana, the explanation for the first mantra recitation mentions that, within the channels and places, the deities are present as the forms of the ten wrathful ones and so forth. Thus, the ten wrathful ones are perfectly complete within the body of Vajrakīlaya. So while the deity possesses an enlightened body, speech, and mind, the ten wrathful ones appear as the embodiments of the Buddha’s ten powers. In this way, the ten wrathful ones appear in limitless ways as aspects of Vajrakīlaya’s qualities and activities, and on the inner level, they are all complete within the maṇḍala of Vajrakīlaya himself.

The ten wrathful deities, however, do not only exist as this one set of ten deities: they also manifest in infinite ways on the outer level. So while, in one sense, they are all included within Vajrakīlaya’s body maṇḍala, they also emanate from him in infinite, limitless way. And this all represents the qualities inherent to one’s own mind. From an impure perspective, anyone with a mind naturally possesses the five afflictive emotions and carries the notion of self and other. But when bodhicitta overpowers self-grasping, the pure qualities—already inherent within the mind—will reveal themselves. Thus, within one living being, the qualities of the three kāyas and the five wisdoms are all naturally complete: they are the natural qualities of anyone’s mind. So

the qualities of mind can temporarily manifest in either a pure or an impure way, and when they manifest in an impure way to us as sentient beings, we practice in order to actualize the pure qualities that are already inherent within the mind.

So that is what is meant by saying that the channels and places are pervaded by the deities. The Buddha spoke about one million two hundred thousand different kinds of life-forms or organisms within your body, and scientists nowadays also say that the body is made up of many different microorganisms, many kinds of life-forms. So it is not just you in the body: there are many different life-forms present, and if you cultivate bodhicitta, all of these millions of organisms within your body all become the pure deity. In Dzogchen, it is also said that if one person attains enlightenment, all the microorganisms within his or her body also attain enlightenment. So this body is not just one solid thing, one single entity that is just you; therefore, when you eat, you can think that you are eating for all these microorganisms. Then your food will become like a feast offering to all those deities—in particular, when we are practicing the Unsurpassed Yoga Tantra. But as far as the different levels of the vehicles and so on, there is much to be said, so you should also ask Khenpo Tenzin about this. But, in brief, this body is not just this one solid entity that is you, and this is why in the visualization we say that the body is pervaded by many different deities.

[Question:] On page twenty-four, what does it mean to combine the accomplishment and engagement activities?

In general, the practice consists of three stages: the approach, the accomplishment, and the engagement in activities. First, during the approach, we recognize the deity; then, during the accomplishment, we practice and accomplish the deity; and finally, once the deity is accomplished, we engage in activities. So here, this particular recitation combines the accomplishment of the deity with the activities of the deity into one practice. And by combining the deity and the retinue of the deity into one, this shows that the retinue of the deity is nothing other than an emanation of the deity's body, speech, mind, qualities, and activities. It is just like how rainbow lights emerging from a crystal are not separate from the crystal. So although it

seems that the outer appearances—the various activity and quality emanations—perform their activities separate from the deity, in actuality, they all arise from the deity. Ultimately, they are all combined with the deity into one; thus, this mantra recitation combines all of them, together with their activities, into one. And since they are all recognized as having arisen from one ultimate truth, here you recognize the ultimate wisdom of great bliss. So this method combines everything into the ultimate—and the great accomplishment practice, or the drubchen, can establish the foundation for this understanding.

[Question:] Can we already start accumulating the second mantra now?

You can accumulate the second mantra, but its essence is already included within the shorter mantra; therefore, you can just accumulate the main shorter mantra. It is like a crystal from which everything else emerges. In the main mantra, “VAJRAKĪLI KĪLAYA” refers to the deity Vajrakīlaya: in essence, to his clear, powerful awareness. The syllables “SARVA BIGHNĀN BĀM HŪM PHAṬ” then collectively destroy all hindrances: they overpower and bring under your control all hindrances, evil forces, and so on.

And what are these hindrances, actually? All of our suffering—our disagreeable circumstances, illnesses, and so on—all arise from dualistic grasping. All of this suffering comes from the negative karma we accumulated in previous lives while being driven by the afflictive emotions that arise from self-grasping. Now that karma has come back around and ripened in this life, and if we continue to allow the afflictive emotions to remain within the mind, we will just continue to accumulate more karma for the future. This is why Milarepa said that “the greatest demon is your own thought.” Therefore, this is the demon, the hindrance, that we overpower or destroy. So this is what we bring under control here—because this is the one who creates all suffering now and in the future. And if you are able to destroy these thoughts now, you will not accumulate more karma for the future.

This can be seen, for example, when two disciples get angry with each other. When anger arises, if you just look at your own mind and recognize the real fault, which is your own negative thought, the anger is then already gone. And once you have recognized one thought, you will have gained the experience of how to practice with all other thoughts. Then, even if you have tens of thousands of different thoughts, you will know that they have all a single essence, and you will know that the only problem is that we grasp at their reality, their truth. So one way to overcome this grasping to the reality of thoughts is to meditate on the syllable HŪṂ, which brings us back to the approach, accomplishment, and activities of the deity. During the accomplishment of the deity, by reciting the mantra or meditating on the HŪṂ, you gain the experience that “Oh, when I meditate on the deity, I am able to let go and destroy all of these thoughts. If I don’t cling to anything in my mind, my mind actually can abide just like space.” So this is the experience you gain with the practice.

All of these aspects of the approach, the accomplishment, and the activities are actually all complete within the recitation of the main KĪLAYA mantra. In the Vajrayāna, there are three kinds of mantras: the secret mantra, the awareness mantra, and the dhāraṇī, or retaining, mantra.

And for Vajrakīlaya, the secret mantra is HŪṂ; the awareness mantra is the nine syllables of VAJRA KĪLI KĪLAYA HŪṂ PHATṬ, in which VAJRA is the main syllable; and the dhāraṇī, or retaining, mantra is the hundred-syllable mantra. So here it like we are having a conversation with these three types of mantra, in which we think: “I’m having all these negative thoughts and I want to purify them, so please let me purify them.”

[Question:] What will be the signs of having accumulated the second mantra?

When you first begin doing the practice, you start by establishing a relationship with the deity: you get to know the deity. Then, after getting to know the deity, you accomplish the deity. And

then after accomplishing the deity, you engage in activity, wherein you recite the activity mantra and visualize the form with one face and two arms and so on.

An outer sign of having accomplished the deity is that whatever you think of or whatever your aspiration may be, it will be accomplished in your activities. But this is only an outer sign. An inner sign—the actual sign of having accomplished the deity—is that the afflictive emotions become primordial wisdom. This is the greatest sign, actually, and it also becomes the secret sign of accomplishment. But as an outer sign, on the outer level, your activities and your conduct will generally become peaceful. Your appearance will be peaceful and subdued, your mind will be filled with love and compassion, and you will also be very patient. And then, through the qualities and enlightened activities that have been accomplished, you will be able to benefit others as well.

So this question here about the outer, inner, and secret signs of the accomplishment of the deity is an important one. In the general sense, the outer sign of having accomplished a deity is that you have the ability to benefit sentient beings with your body, speech, and mind: you can actually do things to benefit them. For example, whomever you come into contact with, whether they see you or hear of you, whether through direct contact or just by hearing about you, will be benefited naturally. And as the inner sign of accomplishment, great love and compassion arise. Immeasurable love arises in your mind. And finally, as a secret sign of accomplishment, all dualistic grasping disappears. So these are the supreme outer, inner, and secret signs of accomplishing the deity, stated in a way that is easy to understand.

In the *Treasury of Pith Instructions*, the omniscient Longchen Rabjam says that when one unifies with the ultimate reality, all dualistic thoughts and all grasping diminish naturally. And when there are no more dualistic thoughts within the mind, all afflictive emotions will be overcome. As long as there are still dualistic thoughts in the mind, however, it will be difficult to overcome the afflictive emotions, which is why it is so important to see the ultimate truth. And it is also why Milarepa said that when you see the ultimate truth, the ten virtuous actions arise naturally and spontaneously, and the ten non-virtuous actions are naturally clarified into the natural state.

[Question:] Rinpoche, please explain the exact meaning of the KĪLAYA mantra.

VAJRA refers to the nature, which is unchanging—the state of Vajradhara. KĪLI KĪLAYA is Vajrakālaya, also known as the Vajra Youth. SARVA means “all,” BIGHNĀN refers to all hindrances, and BAM HŪM PHAT̄ means to destroy these hindrances, or to bring them under one’s control.

[Question:] Is better for a beginner to visualize the mantra garland three-dimensionally, with the HŪM at the center of the spinning mantra, or two-dimensionally, with the garland going clockwise around the HŪM? And does it face inside or outside?

The nine mantra syllables of VAJRAKĪLI KĪLAYA HŪM PHAT̄ face inward, and they circle around the HŪM three-dimensionally. You can imagine that this maṇḍala here at the front of the shrine is like the HŪM syllable, and when you circle around the maṇḍala, you’re like the syllables of the mantra going around the HŪM syllable, sending out your blessings. So the maṇḍala, or the HŪM, stays in the same place; it doesn’t turn. The mantra syllables turn around it.

[Question:] Can you please explain how to meditate in order to actualize the third kīla of subtle bodhicitta—that is, how to awaken the wisdom winds within the channels, winds, and drops meditation?

The kīla of bodhicitta is related to immeasurable love and to wisdom. There are two kinds of winds: the wisdom winds, and the winds of the afflictive emotions. And as long as you cling to

dualistic thoughts of self and other and so on, you are controlled by the winds of the afflictive emotions. Being controlled by the winds of the afflictive emotions means that you believe in the true existence of external appearances, as well as in the appearances within your mind.

The wisdom winds, however, come from recognition of the view, and if you have this recognition, you will be able to destroy the afflictive emotions. As long as you cling to a duality, though, you will not be able to destroy the afflictive emotions. And then, when you come to the bardo, you will become controlled by the karmic winds. So a sign as to whether or not you will become controlled by the karmic winds in the bardo can be seen now in how you react to anger. When you become angry with someone, look at your mind. What happens to your anger? You can know what will happen in the bardo based on what happens with your anger, what you do with your anger. If your awareness is clear and you recognize the anger, and if you uproot it so that it is eliminated completely, this means the wisdom winds have gained victory. This means that you have control, that you are free. On the other hand, if you recognize the anger but then you still focus on the other object and you become controlled by the anger, this means you will be taken by the karmic winds. This is really the point to recognize.

As for the practice of the channels, winds, and drops, it is related to the practice of the Six Yogas of Nāropa. Drubpön Rinpoche here can explain this to you; it is really something that belongs within a different context of instructions. It is not so easy to just explain the channels, winds, and drops, as such a practice needs to be explained within the context of its practice. So you can ask these questions to an experienced disciple or to Drubpön Rinpoche, who has the blessings. In the Drikung Kagyü lineage, for example, most masters of the Six Yogas of Nāropa have completed nine years of retreat, or have done the three-year retreat three times. Or in the Drukpa Kagyü lineage, it would be twelve years of retreat, as it was for Nāropa. But in any case, truly recognizing the difference between the afflicted winds and the wisdom winds requires long practice.

[Question:] What does it mean when Rinpoche waves the katak scarf during the Vajrakīlaya drubchen? Also what is the black triangle, and why does he wave it?

The black triangular cloth is the fierce cloth that is waved toward anyone, especially a disciple, who doesn't want to listen. And the five-colored katak scarf means: "Please wisdom deities, come," so it represents the five wisdoms.

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