

THE VAJRASATTVA MANTRA SEMINAR

First of all, a few words about Vajrasattva.

Vajrasattva is an essentially Tantric, essentially Vajrayanic figure. To the best of my knowledge he doesn't appear anywhere in the other two Yanas - either in the Hinayana or in the Mahayana.

Usually, what is said is that Vajrasattva is a Buddha appearing in Bodhisattva form - in fact, is, in a sense, the Adi-Buddha appearing in Bodhisattva form. So this raises the question of what is the Adi-Buddha, or what is Adi-Buddha. You are familiar with the conception of the Five Buddha Mandala. In the Five Buddha Mandala one has the Central Buddha, who is usually either Vairocana or Akshobya - and the other four Buddhas are arranged around the Central Buddha - they occupy the four points of the compass, the four cardinal points.

So, the Central Buddha is the Fifth Buddha, and the other four Buddhas are aspects of that Central Buddha, even though they also are Buddhas in their own right. But the Central Buddha embodies the Wisdom of the Dharmakaya, or awareness of the Dharmakaya, of the Dharmadhatu rather, the Dharmadhatu-jnana. So in a sense one can say therefore that the Fifth Buddha is the Ultimate Buddha, the Absolute Buddha, and that the other four are specific aspects.

But one can also say that even beyond that there is a still more Esoteric aspect. After all, when you visualise the Mandala of the Five Buddhas it's, as it were, two-dimensional, isn't it? There's a central point, then up, then down, to the right and to the left. Then you could, as it were, imagine a Buddha figure behind the Central Buddha, in the third dimension. So this would be a Sixth Buddha, and that is Vajrasattva. Vajrasattva is in fact sometimes called the Sixth Buddha, meaning thereby that He belongs to an even more Esoteric dimension - that you speak of a Sixth Buddha in a way in which you speak of a fourth dimension, yes? I mean, I've made the parallel between a third dimension and Vajrasattva, but really it should be between a fourth dimension; maybe one could put it still more accurately and think of the Mandala three dimensionally. You've got a Buddha in the centre, you've got Buddhas up and down and also Buddhas back and front. Yes? So therefore you've got Buddhas occupying a central point and three dimensions. So where are you going to put your Sixth Buddha? You can put Him only in the fourth dimension - He's more Esoteric still, more hidden still, more recondite, and that is Vajrasattva. So in this particular context Akshobya occupies the centre of the Mandala, and Vajrasattva is therefore sometimes described as the Esoteric aspect of Akshobya; the Esoteric aspect of the Central Buddha. So, when you go outside three dimensions, when you go, as it were, into a fourth dimension, for all practical purposes so far as we are concerned you go outside space. If you go outside space, you also go outside time, because there isn't time and space, as we are told nowadays, but "space-time." So to go outside space into a fourth dimension is also to go outside time into what one can only describe as Eternity. Yes? So, Vajrasattva represents also that, the Sixth Buddha. He is the Adi-Buddha. "Adi" literally means "from the beginning" or "Primeval." But not from the beginning in the sense of literally from a first point and then continuing within time, but first or primeval in the sense of transcending time altogether.

So you could say that Vajrasattva represents that Esoteric aspect of Buddhahood which transcends both space and time. Yes? And as transcending space He is the Sixth Buddha, as transcending time. He is the Adi-Buddha, the primeval Buddha or First Buddha, "Original Buddha" as it's usually translated. Not only that; not only is Vajrasattva "from the beginning" as it were, but it is specifically said that He is pure from the beginning. Vajrasattva represents the beginningless purity of one's own mind; that is to say one's own Ultimate Mind or Ultimate Essence.

So Vajrasattva is especially connected with purification, especially purification from sins; and the purification consists in the fact that oneself, as Vajrasattva, has never even been defiled; there's no question of purifying yourself, but realising that from the beginning, outside space and outside time, there was never a moment - because there is no moment - when you were not pure. So Vajrasattva's practices are essentially

practices of the realisation of the intrinsically pure nature of one's own mind. Yes? One's own Absolute Mind, or Ultimate Mind. Yes? Do you get the point? So, Vajrasattva is essentially this.

Vajrasattva is also regarded, in the Tantra especially, as the One who saves from Hell. The Vajrasattva Mantra is also repeated in connection with death, in connection with after-death ceremonies.

I remember, in this connection, once I went to see Jamyang Khyentse Rimpoche - he was then in Gangtok - so I had to wait a few minutes before going in, and when I went in he said "I'm sorry I kept you waiting, but a lama friend of mine died, and I have been performing some ceremonies on his behalf." Then I asked, "well, what were you actually performing and reciting" and he said that he was reciting or performing the Vajrasattva mantra, because traditionally it's associated with deliverance from any form of suffering, the extreme form of which, or example of which, is suffering in Hell. It's as though Vajrasattva, from a certain point of view, represents the diametrical opposite. If you take Hell as being the worst experience, the lowest experience, then Vajrasattva represents the best, the highest, the ultimate - not in a relative sense of the higher being relative to the lower, but, as it were, outside relativity altogether; and also the only ultimate deliverance from Hell, or from sin, because it's sin that causes you to fall into Hell - is to realise that you never, in fact, have sinned, that you are primevally pure, pure from the beginning; so in this way Vajrasattva comes in.

Sometimes the name is explained in this way; that "Vajra" is a synonym for "Sunyata." "Pure from the beginning" is often explained as void from the beginning, ultimately real from the beginning. So "Vajra" means the element of ultimate Reality. "Sattva" means the totally purified consciousness which realises that ultimately void nature. So it's as though, in the case of Vajrasattva, one has the fusion of what we can only regard as the Ultimate Object and the Ultimate Subject. It's the ultimately refined subject completely united with, completely knowing, the ultimate object. At that point, the object is not an object, the subject is not a subject. It's the purely clear and transparent knowledge of Sunyata on the part of the completely purified consciousness.

At that Point, of course, they can't really be distinguished as subject and object; Vajrasattva embodies that - outside space and outside time.

So this is what Vajrasattva represents. So, basically in more popular terms, Vajrasattva stands for purification. So one does the Vajrasattva Visualisation and Mantra Recitation for purification from sins - but with the proviso that in the ultimate sense you purify yourself by realising that you have never become impure, because you are pure from the beginning. Any impurity is only apparent, only on the surface.

Obviously one must understand this deeply and sincerely; it doesn't mean that on their own level faults, weaknesses, imperfections, sins, don't matter; but that ultimately they do not matter. Or, I won't say don't matter, but that ultimately you are not affected by them - your own true nature remains underneath all that, intact.

So Vajrasattva is associated, especially as I've said, with purification from sins. For one's actual present feeling is that one is not pure; or at least, not perfect; you may not think of it, you know, so much as impurity, but as something not perfect - that one is conditioned, that one is not free. So, even though, in your ultimate essence you are pure, you are alienated from that purity, you don't feel pure.

So the aim and object of the Vajrasattva Practice is to overcome that sense of alienation, and to restore you to a complete realisation of your ultimately pure nature - your ultimately pure essential nature. Do you get the point?

So you could say 'So the successive clauses of the Vajrasattva Mantra represent a successive, or progressive, overcoming of the alienation between one's ultimately pure, Absolute Being, which is Vajrasattva, or Mind, which is Vajrasattva, and one's mundane, relative, alienated consciousness, which feels impure'.

In other words, as you go through the clauses of the Mantra, you experience, or you feel yourself gradually restored to, a state of reintegration with the original purity of your own nature, as represented by Vajrasattva. In that clear?

So, as you recite the Mantra, you should feel yourself becoming more and more integrated with that ultimately pure nature, more and more in touch with your own intrinsic purity - leaving beside, leaving behind all surface sins and imperfections and impurities and so on. So the important thing in repeating the Mantra, or studying the Mantra, is just to see this progression. Yes?

Question: Is there any association between Vajrasattva and Padmasambhava?

Sangharakshita: Not especially or directly. Padmasambhava belongs to the Padma Family, Lotus Family. Vajrasattva belongs to the Family of Akshobya, which is the Vajra Family. But I personally feel - I think I've mentioned this before - that the Sadhana of Padmasambhava - Maybe I'll give them in the, sort of, proper sequence, the Sadhanas of Tara, Manjughosa, Padmasambhava, Vajrasattva, sort of form a natural group, and I quite like people, wherever possible, to get into all four of these. Yes?

Question: Manjughosa, Tara

Sangharakshita: Tara, Manjughosa, Padmasambhava, Vajrasattva. They seem to hang together spiritually. Perhaps I'll work out, one day, how or why that is. But that is how it seems.

Anyway, you'll notice that there are exactly one hundred syllables in this Mantra. So the Mantra starts off with 'Om'. 'Om' here represents the Ultimate Goal, as it were; it represents Buddhahood or Enlightenment, represents the Dharmakaya. Sometimes it's said that the three letters of 'Om' - because, you know 'Om' is from the A U M - AU together and pronounced as 'O' so if you spell it out in full it's A U M - sometimes it is said that the 'O' is the Dharmakaya, the 'U' is the Sambhogakaya and the 'M' is the Nirmanakaya - in other words the three, so-called, bodies of the Buddha. But even if one doesn't explain it in detail in that way the 'Om' stands for the Ultimate Goal of Buddhahood in its fullness, which of course is one's object, whether one does the Vajrasattva Practice or any other. So the 'Om' comes at the beginning, as a reminder, as it were, of what the ultimate goal of everything that one is doing in the course of the Sadhana, actually is - that one is doing this for the sake of Enlightenment.

Then 'Om Vajrasattva Samaya'. 'Vajrasattva' is, of course, the name of the Buddha appearing as a Bodhisattva Himself. 'Samaya' here means a sort of bond. Sometimes it's translated as 'oath'. Yes? Vajrasattva enters into a sort of bond, or an agreement, or pledge, with you. He, as it were, pledges 'If you do your part, I will do my part.' Yes? 'If you do the practice, I will give the results'.

So, when you take up a Sadhana it's as though you enter into an agreement with the Deity - the Buddha or Bodhisattva of that Sadhana. You undertake to do something, He undertakes to do something; there's an agreement, a bond, a pledge, between you. This is how it is to be understood, broadly and generally.

So 'Om Vajrasattva Samaya'. You recognise that you are not just practising, yourself, in the void, as it were - you know, 'void' in the ordinary sense, not the Buddhist sense (*Laughter*). The nature of things, the ultimate nature of things, as it were, co-operates with you. There is an ultimate purity, as it were, waiting there to be realised by you, which is your own true nature in its ultimate depth. It's not as though it's an entirely subjective process. I mean, taking for the time being subject and object as real, taking the distinction between them as real. There is an object out there which is, as it were, supporting your subjective quest, your subjective effort. So if you do your bit, if you play your part, it will do its. So that is the pledge. The nature of things is such that if you make the right spiritual effort it cannot but bear fruit. You do your part, Vajrasattva will do His part. So you enter into this mutual agreement, as it were.

'Om Vajrasattva Samaya' - you remind yourself of that at the beginning - that there is this Ultimate Ground of your own being, where you are primevally pure. That is there to support, and co-operate with, all your personal efforts. In fact it makes them possible. So 'Om Vajrasattva Samaya'. 'Manupalaya'. Don't forget, you start in a condition of alienation. Vajrasattva does represent your own true Mind - there is this 'Samaya', this agreement or pledge in effect between you, but your present state, your present condition, is one of alienation from your own true nature, but still, nonetheless, that true nature is there, and the fact that it is there, gives you some hope. Not only hope, it gives you a sort of protection. So therefore 'Manupalaya'. Vajrasattva is - it's been translated here - 'defender' or 'protector' of Man; 'Manu' is Man. It also suggests the mind. The fact that you have, back of you, as it were, an Ultimate True Nature which is, as it were, better than you, purier than you, truer than you, means you are, as it were, protected. Even if you don't make any spiritual effort, that is there in the background all the time. It is your sort of better Self, your Higher Self - to use that rather well-known non-Buddhistic phraseology. Your 'Genius', if you like, to use the classical term, overshadowing you - it is there in the background. So it does, in a way, protect you - even from yourself.

So here, you see that though you are in a state of alienation from your own true nature, your own true nature does, as it were, stand behind you - even does function as a sort of protector. You can always turn to it, if you so wish, for help - it's up to you. So there is a sense in which the alienation is not complete.

So then, 'Vajrasattva Tvenopatishta'. Before, Vajrasattva was sort of just standing behind you, maybe in the far distance, you know, as a sort of distant protector, just barely there; but now you're invoking Vajrasattva to stand beside you. The alienation is beginning to be overcome, but you're still quite external, it's Him and you, side by side, shoulder to shoulder. Yes? Not even face to face. So the relationship is, as it were, quite external. Do you see what I mean? But you've come a bit further, you've invoked Vajrasattva now to stand beside you.

Then you say 'Drdho Me Bhava', 'be firm for me'. If you've got your own true Vajrasattva nature standing beside you, you feel that it's there, even though you're still quite alienated from it, that gives you a certain strength, a certain firmness. Yes? You're more centred.

And then you say 'Sutosyo Me Bhava', 'be glad for me'. Now you see the alienation is beginning to be really overcome - there is a sort of warmth between you. The distance or the gulf between you and your own true nature is being overcome. When you're alienated from your own true nature it's as though your own true nature is alienated from you. It's even hostile to you. If you dislike somebody you tend to think that they dislike you, if you're alienated from them they're alienated from you. So before there might have been the feeling that your own true nature, Vajrasattva, was quite distant, even cold, even hostile. But this is beginning to be overcome and you feel a sort of gladness, a joy, a warmth, coming from Vajrasattva to you - and therefore from you to Vajrasattva - the distance is being overcome, there's a bit of emotional rapport between you; you're being truly reconciled to your own true nature, you're beginning to be in touch with your own intrinsic purity.

Then, not only that - 'Suposyo Me Bhava', 'be pleased for me'. Your own true nature is beginning to approve of you, to like you, because you're becoming more like your own true nature, your impurities are being reduced, there's more harmony and agreement and similarity between you. So Vajrasattva is pleased with you, you're invoking Vajrasattva to be pleased with you.

And then you say 'Anurakto Me Bhava', which is translated as 'love me deeply'. 'Anurakto' is more like 'passionately', 'madly' 'violently', - in a positive spiritual sense. You're appealing to Vajrasattva to, as it were, rush together with you. You want to be completely absorbed in each other; you want to be completely reconciled with your own true nature; you want to

completely overcome the sense of alienation from your own true nature. So you appeal to Vajrasattva, 'love me deeply', or 'love me passionately'.

This is a very important Tantric term, 'Anurakto', or 'Anuraga'. It means just 'passion'. Sometimes 'Maha-Anuraga' 'great passion'. The great passion of the Tantra where all your emotional energies are directed towards something transcendental.

So, now there is a sort of complete accord between you and your own true nature.

So, therefore you say next, 'Sarva Siddhim Me Preycha', 'accord me all perfections'. 'Siddhi' means, literally, 'fruit', 'success'. A spiritual perfection. Sometimes it's used in the sense of 'magical powers' - it's a very Tantric term. It has both connotations - both as spiritual perfections and, sort of, magical powers. So Vajrasattva, as the embodiment of Buddhahood, has all these. He's endowed with all possible spiritual perfections. So when Vajrasattva and you become united, what happens? You take over all those perfections. They become yours because you are that now. So you, as it were, appeal to or invoke, Vajrasattva to that end - 'accord me all perfections'. Now that we have become one, let all your perfections, all your Buddha attributes become mine.

'Sarva Karma Sucha Me'. This is sometimes said to be the crucial clause. 'Purify all my Karma'. You're basically concerned with purification. Because we have become one, because I have taken over all your spiritual qualities, all your transcendental attributes, all your Buddha attributes; well, there's no room for my impurities, for my impure karmas, my sins. So, purify them, take them away'. In other words, the last vestige of impurity is removed - you realise, completely, that you are primevally pure.

Then you say 'Chittam Sreyah Kuru Hum'. So, having purified all one's karmas, you say 'make me a better mind', 'Sreyah' means 'high', 'eminent', 'lofty'. It suggests an Enlightened mind; now that I'm purified of all sins let mine be an Enlightened mind, a noble mind, a sublime mind. In other words the mind of a Buddha.

And then you say 'Ha Ha Ha Ha Hoh', - the Transcendental Laughter, the significance of which is that when you wake up, as it were, to your own true nature, you think 'how ridiculous!', I thought that I was impure; but I find that I'm completely pure. I thought that I was unenlightened, but actually I was Enlightened all the time; what a ridiculous mistake!' (*General laughter*). So you laugh.

Now let out these five Transcendental Laughs. Yes? One for each of the Five Wisdoms, the Five Jnanas. Yes? Or each of the Five Buddhas. The 'Ha Ha Ha Ha', the four aspects; the 'Hoh' is the central Wisdom of the Dharmadhatu. You just explode in this sort of way.

And then you say 'Bhagavan Sarva Tathagata'. This means - it is translated here 'Blessed all ye Buddhas'. It's not quite like that. Not only do you realise your own true Buddha Nature and explode with laughter that you'd ever thought you were anything else - when you look all around you see nothing but Buddhas; all beings seem Enlightened, all beings seem Buddhas to you; you see them in their ultimate essence; so you say, as it were, 'well look, everywhere, nothing but Buddhas, all Buddhas'. 'Bhagavan Sarva Tathagata' all are blessed Buddhas, Tathagatas. So this is your, sort of, experience.

So that's the, sort of, highest point that you reach, but for the time being at least, you can't sustain it, you're not yet liberated; it's only a partial vision or a momentary vision.

So then you say 'Vajrama Me Munca'. 'O Vajra-like Ones', - that is to say 'All you Buddhas - liberate me from my conditioned state, my conditioned status; my feeling that I am impure'.

'Vajri Bhava', 'Let me be truly Vajric; let me be ultimately real, let me be a true Individual'.

'Mahasamayassattva'. There's no real grammar here but you appeal, as it were, again to Vajrasattva as 'Mahasamayassattva' He is the great Being of the bond. You sort of remember that there was this pledge, this agreement between you and Vajrasattva, and He has kept it; you've done your bit and He has certainly done His. So, He is the Great Being, the Great Hero, of the bond - that oath or pledge.

And then you say 'Ah Hum Phat', which is translated 'Away with Evil'. 'Phat' means, especially 'destroy' - all evil, all impurity has been destroyed, wiped out; they don't exist any more.

So, you see, it's a very, powerful Mantra, and this is the sort of consciousness one should have, or feeling that one should have, as one goes through it, clause by clause; that you are getting closer and closer, nearer and nearer, to your own true nature, which is the Vajrasattva Nature, which is the embodiment of Primeval Purity, that in fact the purification from sin consists in that realisation that in the ultimate sense you never have sinned.

So, this is quite a good, sort of, antidote for any kind of Christian conditioning - that in your ultimate essence you are not a miserable sinner - that you are absolutely pure. Not on the surface, maybe. On the surface, yes, you may be quite grubby, but in the inner depths, you are Vajrasattva-like; primevally pure.

So, after doing the Visualisation you recite the Mantra, and this is the sort of feeling that you should have as you go through it; of that alienation between your present grubby self - let's say grubby rather than sinful - your present grubby self - and your true, immaculately pure Vajrasattva nature; that that alienation, as the Mantra progresses, is gradually overcome, and each time you recite it you get deeper and deeper into it.

Any point or query about that?

It is really quite straightforward, that the main thing to understand is the progressive nature of these clauses of the Mantra, and how the alienation between you and your own true Vajrasattva nature is being progressively overcome. [Pause]

Question: How should one recite the Mantra?

Sangharakshita: It's quite straightforward. [*Bhante then recited the Mantra*]

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA
MANUPALAYA
VAJRASATTVA TVENOPATISHTA
DRDHO ME BHAVA
SUTOSYO ME BHAVA
SUPOSYO ME BHAVA
ANURAKTO ME BHAVA
SARVA SIDDHIM ME PREYCHA
SARVA KARMA SUCHA ME
CHITTAM SREYAH KURU HUM
HA HA HA HA HOH
BHAGAVAN SARVA TATHAGATA
VAJRAMA ME MUNCA
VAJRI BHAVA
MAHASAMAYASATTVA
AH HUM PHAT!

Just like that. There's a sort of rhythm, but nothing especially musical, though there are tunes to which one can chant it: but that's chanting, say in the context of Puja, rather than reciting in the context of meditation.

Question: It's interesting that although Vajrasattva is an aspect of the Adi-Buddha, the Ultimate Essence, it's almost the most basic Vajrayana Practice, Foundation Yoga.

Sangharakshita: Well, in a way, that is a Vajrayanic principle - you start at the end. *[Laughs]*

Question: It fits with the idea of Vajrasattva.

Sangharakshita: It's a bit parallel to Zen. There's a Zen saying that I've quoted this before - 'If you want to climb a mountain, start at the top'.

Question: Does Samantabhadra have the same association with Vairocana that Vajrasattva has with Akshobya?

Sangharakshita: Yes, broadly speaking, yes.

Question: You see sometimes in Bodhisattva ...

Sangharakshita: Yes, right, yes. Though the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra is a different figure from the Buddha Samantabhadra. I mean, historically speaking. But you often get Samantabhadra in the context of the Nyingmapas. You have this arrangement of Padmasambhava as the Nirmanakaya, the Thousand Armed Avalokiteshvara as the Sambhogakaya, Amitabha as the Dharmakaya, and Samantabhadra as the Svabhavikakaya.

And in the same way, in feminine form, for the Nyingmapas, you have Ekajati as the Nirmanakaya, Tara as the Sambhogakaya.

Question: Akashadhateshvari.

Sangharakshita: No there's Samantabhadri and the ... I can't remember now... Samantabhadri, it must be just the 'Triakaya' in this case. Ekajati as the Nirmanakaya, Tara as the Sambhogakaya, Samantabhadri as the Dharmakaya. In the Vajrayana they're very fond of these, sort of, correlations.

Question: Why is it that in the prostration practice you've got Samantabhadra as being brown, whereas very often He's seen as being blue?

Sangharakshita: Well, you find iconographically both colours.

Question: Does it matter which... should it be brown?

Sangharakshita: It doesn't really - it's just that it's a distinguishing colour. Maybe it was brown because the other colours have been pre-empted by Five Buddhas of the Mandala. What other colour would you have? If it can't be red, or yellow or blue or green or white. If you have a dark blue Samantabhadra it's the same colour as Akshobya. So perhaps it is better to have a distinctive colour. I mean, sometimes He's shown as dark blue, sometimes as brown, but I think I prefer it to be brown, just because it was a different and therefore a distinctive colour.

Question: Doesn't Vajrasattva sometimes appear as blue?

Sangharakshita: Sometimes as dark blue, sometimes light blue, sometimes white. The Sadhanas that I've got, apart from the Mula Yoga Practice, are blue - dark blue - which is the Akshobya colour, and the Yum, the female counterpart is then white.

Question: *[unclear]* And he's dressed as a young Bodhisattva?

Sangharakshita: Yes, though very often in a naked form, just with the jewel ornaments. Samantabhadra

as the Adi-Buddha, as Svabhavikakaya, is always represented without any garments or ornaments at all, for obvious reasons.

Sometimes the Dharmakaya is represented in this way. If you have the Trikaya, and I've seen it in a temple In Nepal, you've got three images, a quite good symbolism, in my opinion. There's Padmasambhava on the ground floor, or Sakyamuni; this is the historical plane. Then there's Amitabha in gorgeous royal robes on the first floor; this in the Archetypal plane, and then a naked Samantabhadra right at the top, on the second floor, representing the Dharmakaya or the Absolute plane.

We have a little of that sort of thing, you know, at Sukhavati - I don't know if you've realised that. There are going to be three levels of shrine. Downstairs we've got the Meditating Buddha, you know, in the main shrine, at the human, historical level. Then, upstairs we have, or we're going to have, the Avalokiteshvara, thousand-armed, and also Padmasambhava.

Question: Where.....

[End of tape]