

Visualization

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Often, people are confused by our deity visualization practice. They tell me that visualizing deities and pure realms is an ordinary mental activity like any other ordinary mental activity. They feel that it is not meditative and that it just creates more mental concepts.

The problem here is that the theory behind the practice, the intellectual basis or philosophical understanding for the practice of visualization, is not being correctly understood. It also shows that our belief system is nihilistic. What I mean by “nihilistic” is that, for example, when people meditate they often believe that there should be no thoughts and no concepts, just a state of mind with no action and no content whatsoever. Actually, this is a numb, inert state of mind that is mistaken as a deep meditative state. To make matters worse, when this deep meditative state is achieved, they want to hang onto it and pack it into a box so they can always have access to it. Then if they achieve this, they feel satisfied and believe that are practicing meditation.

What is our reason for visualizing deity mandalas and purelands? First, we have to look at our final goal. What are we trying to do here? We want to attain Buddhahood, achieve or realize an enlightened state, don't we? What is an enlightened state? Well, it is not a fixated or dull state. It is a completely, fully awakened, expanded state of awareness. It is omniscient wisdom mind. So whatever we are doing, whether meditating or running our daily lives, our aim is to awaken ourselves and experience an enlightened state. If we want to do this, we have to leave behind our habitual, dull state of mind, our conditioned mind that is veiled by ignorance. It becomes important that in our meditation practice or spiritual path, we do not increase our ignorance or dullness by meditating incorrectly. We have enough ignorance and dullness already!

Why do something the hard way if there is an easy way? Deity visualization is a tool that makes it easier to meditate correctly and effectively. It helps us to recognize our own beautiful Buddha essence. It stimulates us and wakes us up. In deity visualization, we make the deities as beautiful as possible. Then our personal experience of that beauty (which we created) gives us a taste of our own Buddha-essence. We don't visualize deities as if they were inert statues or ordinary flesh and blood beings. We are careful to visualize them as the quality of rainbow light, substanceless light, magical-like light that is completely pure, yet vibrant with color, shape, energy, and so forth.

The main point is that a Buddha recognizes his or her own completely pure basic nature. Consequently, a Buddha is free of ignorance and never has dualistic subject/object concepts such as perceiving oneself to be separate from others. For Buddhas, all experiences and

seemingly outer phenomena are the display of one's wisdom mind. Do you think that this light can be separated from the light bulb? For Buddhas, phenomena and experience aren't separate from wisdom Buddha mind and all-pervasive Buddha mind encompasses all phenomena. For unenlightened beings, their mind is partial or in pieces. It solidifies reality, classifies it, and describes it, saying, "This is good, this is bad; this is better, this is worse." Unenlightened mind is always attempting to make sense out of many pieces. This is completely wrong.

How can these pieces be released? We begin by opening our minds, making our minds as vast as the sky. This is a technique. When you experience that scale of vastness with your mind, you will see that all reality is a display of one's mind. You become a Buddha, a wisdom being. But what is wisdom? It is knowing the nature of one's being.

In deity visualization we are exercising – we are letting go and releasing. Reality becomes a pure realm where all sentient beings are enlightened. There are no "pieces." We release holding emotional attachments and mental poisons that fixate, saying "Oh, I know this person," with their name, address, telephone number, what this person did before, what he or she is doing now, and so on. We usually hold all that information very tightly and solidly. To counteract our grasping at all that information, we begin by visualizing deities and purelands, and then we are able to just let go and create with our minds, without desire-attachment, anger-aversion, or ignorance. This is the most basic and very big difference between visualization practice and ordinary mental activity.

When you visualize, you know that your mind is creating your experience. You know that what you experience is the display or expression of your own mind and that it's not the product of anything else. You know that already. When this view becomes habitual, liberation is right there. This is how it is for Buddhas – phenomena are known to be a display or expression of mind. The five outer elements are one's body, the five inner elements are one's speech, and consciousness is one's mind. All three are in one single set.

As soon as you start practicing visualization, you are no longer engaging in ordinary mental activity. Instead, you are a yogi experiencing some taste of Buddha essence. Normally we experience duality, but if we are practicing visualization clearly, with luminosity, it helps to counteract our dualistic habit because we have only one mind. When our one mind holds the visualization of a pure wisdom form, then our dualistic mind no longer operates. We have already reached a level of awakening.

Buddha is not somebody. Don't create a picture of Buddha as somebody else over there. Buddha is the pure basic aspect of yourself. Whoever cannot see their Buddha purity is an unenlightened or unrealized being. But consider this: if there is light, and I open my eyes, I can experience the light. But if my eyes are closed, I can't experience it. Now, has the light gone away? No, it is still there, but because my eyes are closed I cannot see it. Similarly, at present we do not see our Buddha essence. That is not Buddha's fault. It is our own fault because our wisdom eyes are closed.

I always say “Practice, practice, practice.” Why? Because the more you practice, the less you are an unrealized being and the more you are a Buddha. Right away reality becomes less solid to you. It becomes lighter, less heavy, more like a rainbow. For example, when you are visualizing, the deity pervades the entire universe, and also the entire universe is within the deity. The deity and the universe are inseparable. There is no time, form, size, or separation. One moment can be an eon of time, and an eon of time can be one moment. It is dualistic mind that makes up time – past, present, and future. At the wisdom level, there are no time limits and no limits to phenomena. At the wisdom level, there is only one experience – all-pervasive, awakened Buddha essence.

So to practice means that first an experience is created; then that experience is deepened; and lastly, that level is experienced without interruption. That is how we become Buddhas. As soon as you understand this process, then visualization, ritual music, mudras, and rituals don’t bother you. I recently visited Jeff’s sports bar in Tacoma and I asked my student Susie, “When we’re doing puja, playing music, and chanting, which is noisier, puja or Jeff’s bar?” Why is our practice so noisy? Because then it’s hard for us to fall asleep! Our practice is to be awake. That is the quality of omniscient wisdom Buddha mind. To be like that is our aim.

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