

# Shinzen Describes the Vajrayana Practice

00:00:00 So, in being ordained as a monk, I understand you had to undergo a hundred day period in  
00:00:17 solitary.  
00:00:20 I would be very interested in hearing you talk about that experience.  
00:00:24 That sounds like a significant event to go through.  
00:00:29 It was pretty intense, especially for someone who is basically scattered, wimpy, and easily  
00:00:36 bored.  
00:00:39 I had to every day do three buddharingana rituals, and sometimes those would take an  
00:00:52 hour or two, sometimes they'd take up to five hours.  
00:00:56 And then in between there were many other activities.  
00:01:01 The only human that I communicated with was my teacher.  
00:01:05 Where were you?  
00:01:07 I was in isolation up at Mount Koya.  
00:01:10 I had a room where I would stay, where I would sleep at night.  
00:01:16 And then during the day I'd go to the hall, the main hall of the temple, and I would do  
00:01:23 the three ceremonies.  
00:01:25 And then every two or three days I'd meet with the teacher who would teach me the next  
00:01:31 step in the ceremony.  
00:01:32 So it's an initiation process.  
00:01:38 So by the end of the hundred days I had learned all the basic ceremonies of the Japanese buddharingana  
00:01:46 practice.  
00:01:47 On the surface they look like making offerings to deities, but in the depths what goes on  
00:01:59 is that you visualize yourself as the deity, so you replace your body image with the image  
00:02:06 of the deity.  
00:02:08 You replace your internal talk with the mantra of the deity.  
00:02:14 You make gestures with your hands called mudras, which impacts the physical body.  
00:02:22 And then you create the feel in your body, the emotional quality of the deity.  
00:02:29 You're doing all these simultaneously?

00:02:31 All at the same time.

00:02:33 So you've got the physical body and emotional body helped by the mudras.

00:02:37 That's a lot to keep track of.

00:02:40 Well, yeah, that's the point.

00:02:43 You replace your personal internal talk with the mantra of the deity and talk space.

00:02:49 Then you visualize yourself as the deity, so you replace your own personal image with

00:02:55 the deity's image.

00:02:58 Now since we identify with body and mind, whatever goes into the brain in the place

00:03:06 where body and mind experience is processed, the brain says, this is who I am.

00:03:13 So if you replace the physicality and emotionality of your human self with that of an archetype,

00:03:22 and you replace your mental images with that of the archetype, and you replace your internal

00:03:28 talk with that of the archetype, you become the archetype.

00:03:33 Your identity shifts from your normal human existence to this other thing.

00:03:39 Now this is not insanity.

00:03:43 It has to be distinguished from two states, insanity and shamanic possession.

00:03:48 It's neither of those.

00:03:50 It's a systematic process designed to bring about classical enlightenment, but in a way

00:03:56 very different from early Buddhism.

00:03:58 In early Buddhism, you would break things down.

00:04:02 This part is the physical body, this part is the emotional body.

00:04:06 You break things down into the pieces and then you would see, oh, I'm not these pieces.

00:04:12 In Vajrayana, what you do is you work with the same pieces, but you intentionally create

00:04:18 mythical versions of them.

00:04:21 Notice that when you do that, you become that, and that gives you the exact same insight.

00:04:26 In other words, in early Buddhism, you got insight into the arbitrary nature of self-identification.

00:04:34 You become enlightened, enlightened means that your identification process is elastic.

00:04:40 You're nothing particular, so you can be anything, so you're everything, but you're also the

00:04:44 nothing that's the source of everything all at the same time.

00:04:48 In early Buddhism, they did that by dividing into pieces and then seeing, I'm none of these.

00:04:55 But in Vajrayana, you create a mythical version of it.

00:05:00 Notice that your identity shifts, and then when you drop that, your identity shifts back

00:05:05 to the human, but you realize that it must all be arbitrary.

00:05:10 So the transition is where the insight comes.

00:05:14 Does it depend on which deity you pick?

00:05:18 I mean, as an actor, you're envisioning other people and you're putting it in your body,

00:05:25 but it's not a deity.

00:05:27 So I imagine what deity you're picking would affect the experience, or is it simply doesn't

00:05:33 matter what you're picking?

00:05:36 It's very interesting how they do it.

00:05:38 First they teach you how to do it with a wide variety of deities over that one, that hundred

00:05:45 day period.

00:05:47 You get to explore many archetypes.

00:05:49 Pick your favorite deity.

00:05:51 Not quite, but you explore compassionate deities, you explore wrathful deities, you explore

00:05:59 avatars of fear, you explore compassion and so forth.

00:06:07 After you've had a chance to explore all these identities, when you complete the training,

00:06:15 then you get your full initiation.

00:06:20 And at the full initiation, which lasts all night, they take you blindfolded in front

00:06:27 of this giant mandala that has all the deities of the universe in it.

00:06:32 They give you a flower and you hold the flower and you're completely disoriented and you

00:06:41 drop the flower.

00:06:43 Whatever flower the deity falls on, your master calls out the name of that deity.

00:06:52 That's the deity that is your Ishta Devata.

00:06:56 That's the deity that is going to be the one that has been selected by this process.

00:07:02 Are you allowed to say what your deity was or is that a secret thing?

00:07:07 You're not allowed to say, but it's a very interesting process, yes.