

Tibetan Buddhist Yoga
The Practice of the Five Wisdom Energies
by Irini Rockwell

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We all have our ways. We can be charming, easy-going, clear-minded, efficient, generous and appreciative. Other times we can be stubborn, jealous, picky and fussy, possessive and angry. At times we shine, at times we feel stuck. The way we are—our emotions, the way we speak, dress and relate to others—are manifestations of our fundamental energetic makeup.

Tibetan or tantric Buddhism—a contemplative tradition with an understanding of energy at its core—categorizes humans as having five basic qualities. Each energy style expresses itself in personality traits we commonly classify as ‘dysfunctional’ or ‘neurotic,’ *as well as* those we consider constructive or wise. Both troublesome and pleasant emotions arise out of this energetic matrix.

In “*The Five Wisdom Energies, a Buddhist Way of Understanding Personalities, Emotions and Relationships*,” I give the following descriptions of the five energies – their colors and inherent wisdom and confusion:

- The *buddha family* radiates a white energy, spacious and peaceful. Buddha energy is an all-pervasive, peaceful space - this is its wisdom quality. It also can be solidly immobile with the density of ignoring or denying - its confused quality.
- The *vajra family* reflects a blue energy. Like a crystal-clear mirror, vajra reflects what it sees without bias. But it also has a self-righteousness that can harden into cold or hot anger.
- The *ratna family* exudes a rich and earthy golden-yellow energy that encompasses everything. The wisdom quality of ratna energy is richness, equanimity and satisfaction. But it also can turn into greedy territoriality and puffed-up pride.

- The *padma family* glows with the vitality of red energy. Padma's passion is, at its best, compassionate wisdom. In its wisdom, it is finely tuned to what is happening, without bias. However, when neurotic, it can cling obsessively to what gives pleasure.
- The *karma family* emits a green energy, swift and energetic like the wind. Karma energy is all-accomplishing action for the benefit of others. But it also can become power-hungry, manipulative, competitive and envious.

Awareness of these energies can offer a perspective on all aspects of our life—particularly our relationships. When beginning to explore the energies I found myself asking, *Why is it that one person might bring out intellectual curiosity and another physical desire? Why do I feel at ease with one person and anxious with another? Why do I feel powerful in one situation but inhibited and frustrated in another? What is the energetic relationship between people, these situations and myself?*

Beginning in 1972, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a Tibetan Buddhist meditation master, developed the practice associated with the five energies. The practice of taking postures in specifically designed rooms or with colored glasses was designed to evoke the qualities of each of the energies. The postures are based on traditional Buddhist teachings on inner yoga, the energy channels and *chakras*. Our neurotic tendencies can block these channels and chakras. With intensive practice, we can purify or “flush out” the blocked energy.

The psychological premise on which this practice is based is that our wisdom, our sanity, is embedded in the very energy we experience as neurotic. By heightening the energy associated with each posture, we challenge habitual patterns, which often have been locked in our body for years. When our neurosis is exposed we can feel even more neurotic. By embracing the intensified energy and surrounding it with an attitude of unconditional friendliness, we experience relaxation, warmth and clarity. Our stuck energy is transmuted into brilliant sanity. We then find ourselves crying or laughing. We break through, into an unconditional acceptance of ourselves. This is the power of the practice.

Each posture is designed to intensify and transmute a specific neurotic pattern by releasing blockages:

- The buddha posture suggests drawing inward, creating a closed, secure place. It works with laziness and a tendency to ignore. By becoming aware of larger space, we relax into a basic sense of being.
- The vajra posture frustrates the desire to scan our surroundings and take an overview. It thwarts our preoccupation with details, our desire to know what is going on. We may become angry. And then, we may discover a confidence in what we already know, an inherent knowing.
- The ratna posture has a feeling of expansion. We want to embrace the whole world, but we can't move. We feel there is much more to be appreciated, but the richness is beyond our reach. The posture reinforces a sense of poverty and insubstantiality until there's no point pretending anymore—at which point we begin to feel the richness inside of us.
- The padma posture frustrates the longing to possess. We can't be easygoing or comfortable because we are lying in this posture. We are stuck in mediocrity, boredom. Then we discover all that we desire is within us
- The karma posture has an immobility that helps us become aware of the contrast between moving and not moving. In karma's neurotic state, something always has to be happening; in this restricted state, all we can do is look at the impulse. Eventually we give up the struggle and experience space.

I am continually amazed at how often people do a posture briefly, with no idea of what to expect, and then give a textbook description of the energy. At the same time, people have a wide range of experiences—there is no particular experience we are meant to have.

This practice, most often, is done as an intensive discipline in a group setting. The group provides, as I say in my book:

“A nonjudgmental, supportive container with an attitude of fundamental acceptance of whatever arises. It is a safe, nurturing group that supports and encourages each person to be genuine. In such a community, we explore without

censure, so our neuroses are neither repressed nor indulged but are openly recognized. It allows the best and the worst to come out.”

Irini Rockwell, MA, Director of the Five Wisdoms Institute, is a consultant, coach and facilitator of Five Wisdoms workshops and training programs. She draws from a background in dance, creative process, psychotherapy, Buddhism and leadership training. The Five Wisdoms Institute promotes training programs internationally in a variety of professional venues for educators, health professionals, leaders and artists.

Irini also taught the first Buddhist class that our editor-in-chief ever grocked. For more:

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