

Karla Jackson-Brewer

*Turning Turmoil into Clarity*

Week Two: Five Poisons and Five Wisdoms

July 14, 2019



Hello everyone, I'm Karla Jackson-Brewer. I'm a Vajrayana practitioner and an authorized teacher from Tara Mandala Retreat Center in Pagosa Springs, Colorado.

Today, I'm going to talk about the five wisdom dakini families in general, and then I'm going to dive deeper into the Buddha dakini family specifically. We'll learn about the specific encumbered emotions and the wisdom types that they transfer into.

Let's take a moment to generate our motivation. We're going to generate an intention to practice, and that what we learn today will benefit ourselves and benefit all sentient beings. Just connect to your heart and send that intention out. [Pause.] Thank you.

The five wisdom families are an aspect of expression or consciousness in Vajrayana Buddhism. Each of these five families is associated with a particular color, sound or seed syllable, direction, terrain, element, and emotion. The emotion is either an encumbered emotion or a wisdom emotion.

One of the primary ways of working with these energies is through a mandala practice. These aspects of consciousness manifest in all of the elements. The five elements associated with these five families are space, water, earth, fire, and air. Interestingly, these elements comprise much of the earth, but they also are in us. We have all of these five elements, so we have a lot to work with. The elements are also expressed as light. Sometimes we forget this. We think of ourselves as materially formed beings, but we're actually energy and light, and the light radiates from us.

Each of these five families is also associated with a color: white, blue, yellow, red, and green. If you go into a Tibetan Buddhist temple you will see those colors in the brocades and sometimes around thangkas, the sacred paintings. These colors are an important part of Tantric Vajrayana Buddhism as they remind us of these five expressions of consciousness and of our own luminosity. Each of these families is associated with an encumbered emotion as well as a wisdom expression.

Sometimes we think we have to get rid of emotions, as though we need to conquer them and remove them. But in Vajrayana Buddhism we don't have to remove anything, we just transform them. It's helpful to think of the encumbered emotions existing simultaneously with the wisdom

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emotions. All we're really doing at the core level is recognizing the wisdom that exists in these emotional expressions.

The colors that I mentioned hold the essence of these families. The color radiates light and energy similarly to how wisdom radiates. When you meet someone who has meditated for a long time, or is identified as on the path to enlightenment, you can feel that radiation of wisdom and light energy.

Before we even look at the emotions, we can see that the elements themselves have a dynamic quality. When you think about space, for example, it's dynamic quality is potentiality: anything can arise from space. We see the dynamic energy of water in a turbulent, roiling river or in waves. The dynamic energy of earth is its solidity. You sit down on the ground you know you're not going to fall through (unless you're on shifting sand.) The energy of fire is that it consumes and sometimes pulls you in. Did you ever look at a candle or a fire in a fireplace and notice how it draws you in and magnetizes you? Then there is the energy of air. Air is pretty turbulent as we've experienced just recently here in New York City and across the country as we've had some storms.

Both the elements and our emotions have a dynamic energy. When we talk about mandala practice, working with the dakinis, and working with the five wisdom families, we are not talking about a static practice. We're talking about something that's shifting, moving, and changing, and Vajrayana Buddhism creates an environment for that to happen.

As humans, we have many habitual patterns that get in the way much of the time. We're often trying to manage our powerful emotions, sometimes trying to get rid of them, and very frequently suffering from them. They are the kind of energy that blocks. When you think about envy, anger, or pride, you can really feel how toxic those expressions and patterns can become. This is why they're referred to as the five poisons in Buddhism. Some people are familiar with the three poisons—anger, ignorance, and craving. But here we're looking at five poisons, which are these encumbered emotions that I'll cover in more detail as we dive into each family. There's ignorance or denial, anger, pride, and envy or competition. Pride is about not feeling worthy, or that you're not good enough. It's that kind of emptiness, not the emptiness of spaciousness, but of craving, the craving for relationships or people. These poisons can really block us.

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Where do they block us? Ultimately, they block us from our own enlightenment, but they also block us in our everyday expression. We get stuck and angry, and this gets in the way of us just having a life and being at peace. The five poisons inhibit our self-actualization on one level, and they also inhibit our enlightenment. Lama Tsultrim prefers to call these “encumbered emotions.” When the energies are recognized in their true nature, we develop wisdom about them, and it’s as if the encumbrance is dissolved. We’re not trying to get out of these emotions, we just want to recognize what they are. We recognize this through a transformative process and through the assistance of the dakinis who act as midwives for our transformation and enlightenment.

I shared the five poisons and I want to talk a little bit about the five wisdoms. What wisdoms do these poisons transform into? The first of the five wisdoms is all-encompassing wisdom, sometimes referred to as the wisdom of spaciousness, being able to just be in space, or hold space. The second is mirror-like wisdom, the wisdom of being like a mirror. A mirror or water is not changed by anything it reflects—it remains the same. Mirror-like wisdom is also pristine clarity and equanimity. You don’t need to gather things, you don’t need to hold things, and you don’t need to accumulate things. It’s equanimity, abundance, and fullness in terms of discernment are there already.

The wisdom of discernment is the knowledge that you don’t have to magnetize people to yourself: you are enough. Then all-accomplishing wisdom is the energy that whatever you need to get done is going to get done. In fact, it is already being done. We can even say it’s done at its inception.

Those are the five wisdoms that are traditionally connected to the five encumbered patterns. How do we learn to work with these five families? We work with them through the dakini mandala practice, the practice of the wisdom of the five dakinis. We don’t have enough time in this series to learn the whole practice but I’m going to give you a very shortened version of it where you get to feel the transformation of these energies.

In the mandala, we start in the center. The Buddha dakini sits in the center, and the Vajra dakini sits in the east. At the moment, I’m facing east, so the Vajra dakini would be in front of me, the Ratna dakini who is the energy of equanimity is on my right, the Padma dakini is behind me, and

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the Karma dakini is to my left. We can travel through the mandala and around the mandala, sounding seed syllables and working these energies.

I want to begin introducing the Buddha dakini family. The Buddha dakini family sits in the center of the mandala, the color is white or clear, the encumbered emotion is spaciness, delusion, or denial, the seed syllable is “BAM,” B-A-M, and the element is space. A few of the encumbered patterns associated with the Buddha dakini family are delusion, denial, wanting to hide your head under the covers, not wanting to deal with things, waiting for things to happen, being stuck, and being frozen. The wisdom expression that you can have access to with the Buddha dakini family is the wisdom of *dharmadhatu* [true nature], the wisdom of spaciousness: a wisdom as vast as the sky. We can feel as vast as the sky and not get nervous about it, we possess a level of calm, peacefulness, and being with what is, in a way that is almost like resting: a relaxed nature.

I want to quickly teach you a sound practice. Feel a time when you felt sad, depressed, in denial, or when you were procrastinating, and see where you can feel that. Hold that in your body, and as you do, I want you to sound the syllable “BAM” and imagine that your body’s being flooded with white light. I’ll do it for a few minutes, “BAM.” Do it with me, “BAM.” Really see the flood of light. “BAM.” Now check in. Do you still feel that delusion, denial, and procrastination at the same level? You might notice that there’s been a little shift.

This is a practice that you could do over a period of 60 seconds, or even 30 seconds. You just keep sounding the syllable and seeing the color flood through your body and then checking in to see how you feel.

Today we’ve been introduced to the five dakini families. We’ve been introduced to the Buddha family, and have some understanding of the associated encumbered emotions and wisdoms with this family. You’ve received a little taste of a beginning practice to work on your own transformation. I encourage you to practice this between now and the next time we’re together, and observe what happens.