

Irini Rockwell Talks about The Five Wisdom Energies

Karmê Chöling program: September 18-21, 2003

Open to new and experienced practitioners of the five energies and all levels of Buddhist practice.

Irini Rockwell, author of *The Five Wisdom Energies, A Buddhist Way of Understanding Personalities, Emotions, and Relationships* spoke to Karmê Chöling about her upcoming program.

Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, beginning in 1972, developed the practice of taking postures in colored environments to evoke and intensify the qualities of five energetic patterns. This practice is derived from Tibetan or tantric Buddhism, a contemplative tradition with an understanding of energy at its core. Each energy style expresses itself in some personality traits that we commonly classify as dysfunctional or neurotic and in some that we consider constructive or wise. Both troublesome emotions and pleasant ones arise out of this energetic matrix, as follows:

The ***buddha family whose essence is spaciousness*** radiates a white energy, spacious and peaceful. Buddha energy is an all-pervasive, peaceful space; this is its wisdom quality. It can also be solidly immobile with the density of ignoring or denying; that is its confused quality.

The ***vajra family whose essence is clarity*** reflects a blue energy like a crystal-clear mirror. Vajra energy reflects what it sees without bias; this is its wisdom quality. It also has a self-righteousness that can harden into cold or hot anger; that is its confused quality.

The ***ratna family whose essence is richness*** exudes a rich and earthy golden yellow energy that encompasses everything. The wisdom quality of ratna energy is richness, equanimity, and satisfaction. But it can also turn into greedy territoriality and puffed-up pride, which is its neurotic quality.

The ***padma family whose essence is passion*** glows with the vitality of red energy. Padma energy's passion is, at its best, compassionate wisdom. At its neurotic worst, it manifests as grasping. In its wisdom it is finely tuned in to what is happening, discriminating experience without bias. However, when it is neurotic, it can cling obsessively to what gives pleasure.

The ***karma family whose essence is activity*** emits a green energy, swift and energetic like the wind. Karma energy is all-accomplishing action for the benefit of others; this is its wisdom quality. It can also become power-hungry, manipulative, competitive, and envious; that is its confused quality.

Irini Rockwell, MA draws from a background in dance, creative process, psychotherapy, meditation, Buddhism, and leadership training. Traveling internationally, she leads workshops and ongoing training programs with the five energies work for educators, health professionals, organizational leaders, artists,

and for personal growth. She is a senior teacher in the Shambhala International community and director of the Five Wisdoms Institute (www.FiveWisdomsInstitute.com).

You have been teaching this work for many years. How does someone benefit from doing these programs?

Everyone has their own journey with this work. However, in general, individuals gain more sense of their own “colorings,” the constantly shifting energies in their personalities. They also gain an understanding of how they interact with others, the environments they inhabit, and what they enjoy and struggle with in their lives. They begin to see that they have all five energies in some combination and discover their unique mix. Most importantly they develop a deeper understanding and acceptance of themselves and others.

What are the methods used to work with energy?

The cornerstone of the program is the practice of the five postures, allowing people to have a direct, immediate sense of the energies. The postures are based on traditional Buddhist teachings on the inner yoga of the body: the energy channels and chakras. They work with psychophysical energy patterns so both mind and body are involved. By taking these postures we work to purify or clear the blocked energy in the channels. If our energy is blocked, we manifest neurotically; when our energy is purified, our wisdom shines forth. The same principle applies in such methods as acupuncture, yoga, and Tai Chi, which all work with energy.

Supporting this is the practice of sitting meditation. This is necessary because whereas the postures heighten or intensify energy, sitting practice settles and tames energy. So they work together. An analogy I often use is that if you have a glass of muddy water, adding color just makes it muddier. However, if you allow the mud to settle, in adding color to pure water, you see the color's brilliance.

We also have the opportunity to explore each color by expressing its energy through various media such as coloring, moving, sounding, and writing poetry. Everyone has their own way of expressing themselves. This is not about creating great works of art but about manifesting our experience in some way. Creative expression flowing out of the fullness of our experience is the essence of contemplative way of being. I love the Balinese saying, “We have no art; we do everything as well as possible.”

Though this practice can be intense, the program creates an environment of friendliness. We become a community in which the good, the bad and the ugly are embraced as just our good energy which we refine to become the best of who we are.

People have a tendency to identify themselves with one of the five wisdom energies. You write in your book that this is a pitfall, a misunderstanding of the essence of the practice.

We tend to want to pin down who we are but that only further creates a sense of solidified self. The point is to expand our palate of permissible energies and open to the mandala, the totality and interconnectedness of the energies. So we avoid analyzing and categorizing; instead, we contemplate the energies and open to the experience of the moment. Each moment could be fresh, with a new insight. Exploring the mix of colors in ourselves, others and the environment gives this work tremendous breadth and depth. The whole thing becomes quite provocative.

How do the wisdom energies relate to personality types?

People express their energy through attitudes, emotions, decisions, and actions. We each display energy in our own unique ways—through body posture, facial expressions, mannerisms, word choices, the tone and tempo of our voice. When our energy is open, we experience ourselves as being synchronized with ourselves in whichever energetic pattern. When our energy is closed, we feel confused and stuck. Being open or closed determines how we view ourselves and consequently the world. Each of us have our unique ways of perceiving and interacting with the world.

How do individuals deal with their stuck or neurotic aspects?

The psychological premise on which energy work is based is that our wisdom, our sanity, is embedded in the very energy we experience as neurotic. We tend to think we are wrong or bad to have intensified emotions, so we habitually try to get rid of them by bottling them up or by acting them out. However, in this way of working the instruction is to invite the energy and stay with it. By staying with the energy, we discover its essence, a bedrock of vital force within us. It might be the first time we actually experience energy. We realize we don't have to hide our good energy; it's ours and it's okay.

Each posture heightens the pattern of energy associated with it, challenging habitual patterns that might have been locked in our body for years. When our neurosis is thus exposed we could feel even more neurotic. By embracing the intensified energy and surrounding it with unconditional friendliness—an experience of relaxation, warmth and clarity—our stuck energy can transmute into brilliant sanity, our wisdom. We then might find ourselves crying or laughing. We have broken through to an acceptance of ourselves. This is the power of the practice. We've come home: we are okay just the way we are.

For instance, being clear is associated with the blue energy. However, it can turn into "I'm right." Anger surfaces when we insist on being right and force our clarity on others. By making friends with our neurosis, we see that our neurosis and sanity are opposite sides of the same coin. In staying with the anger, we see the clarity in it. We can be clear; we don't have to be right. This is seeing the wisdom in the darkness of confusion.

How can someone integrate the Five Wisdom Energies into their life?

Awareness of these energies can offer a perspective on all aspects of our life, both private and work. When we have gained some familiarity with them and the principles that govern them, they give us insights into our life situations. When we are able to stop self-referencing, we see the play of energy of personal and interpersonal dynamics. We gain insight into how situations just happen when certain energies interact: how some can be wonderful and creative and others painful and stuck; how we clash with some people and feel at ease with others. We can be aware of when we close and freeze and when we open and engage. We become more sensitive to others and develop compassionate and genuine relationships.

Why do you feel that Karmê Chöling is a good place for people to learn about the Wisdom Energies?

A residential setting is ideal for this practice as it allows people to be free of distractions and go deeper into the practice. You couldn't ask for more in Karmê Chöling. It is a beautifully contained and protected environment for participants. It helps us to build a stronger community and a deeper program.

Any last comments?

Working with the five wisdom energies is very transformative work. Even in a relatively short program, someone can have a breakthrough experience. Most importantly, we create an environment where people can relax into who they are, celebrating their sanity and using their stuck places as work points.