

THE VAJRA, BELL, AND BEADS



THE VARJA (Dorje)

The Vajra is the quintessential symbol of Vajrayana Buddhism, which derives its name from the vajra itself. The Sanskrit term vajra means 'the hard or mighty one,' and its Tibetan equivalent *dorje* means an indestructible hardness and brilliance like the diamond, which cannot be cut or broken. The vajra essentially symbolizes the impenetrable, immovable, immutable, indivisible, and indestructible state of enlightenment or Buddhahood

Vajras may have nine, five or three spokes. The spokes of a peaceful vajra meet at the tip whereas those of wrathful vajra are slightly splayed at the end. When paired with a bell their length can vary from four finger-widths to twenty-eight finger widths.

The upper sets of spokes of a five spoked vajra symbolize the five wisdoms, which are

- ❖ The Mirror like Wisdom--that which reflects all sense perceptions--is purified when one attains enlightenment and realizes mirror-like wisdom.
- ❖ The wisdom of equality arises after all the feelings of pleasantness, unpleasantness and indifference have been purified.
- ❖ The wisdom of individual analysis arises when the factor of discrimination, which distinguishes one object from another, is purified. It enables one to benefit each sentient being according to his or her needs and disposition.
- ❖ The wisdom of accomplishing activity arises when the basic ability to perform acts according to particular circumstances is purified.
- ❖ The wisdom of the sphere of reality arises when consciousness is purified and becomes the mind that is the seed of the wisdom truth body of Buddha.

The five lower spokes symbolize the five mothers.

In the case of the nine spoked vajra, the upper spokes symbolize the Buddhas of the five families and the four mothers, one between each of the Buddhas. The lower spokes represent the five wisdoms and the four immeasurable wishes of love, compassion, equanimity and joy.

The Sea-monster's mouth from which each spoke emerges represents freedom from cyclic existence. Of the two lotuses at the hub of the vajra, the upper one symbolize the eight Bodhisattvas and the lower one, the eight goddesses. Paired with a bell the vajra represents method or compassion.

THE BELL (Dri bul)

A bell can be eight, twelve, sixteen, eighteen or twenty two finger-widths in height. Its base must be round, above which is a vase surrounded by the face of the goddess Prajnaparamita. Above these are a lotus, a moon disc and finally a vajra.

The hollow of the bell symbolizes the wisdom cognizing emptiness. The clapper represents the sound of emptiness. The eight lotus petals are the four mothers and four goddesses, and the vase represents the vase containing the nectar of accomplishment.

Paired with the vajra, the bell represents wisdom, and as wisdom and method are an undivided unity so the vajra and bell are never parted or employed separately. The vajra represents the compassion of the Buddha, the masculine principle; and the bell represents wisdom, the female principle. To achieve enlightenment, those two principles must be combined. The bell is visualized as the Buddha's body, the vajra is visualized as his mind, and the sound of the bell is visualized as Buddha's speech in teaching of the dharma.

BEADS (Mala)



Beads are mainly used to count mantras which can be recited for four different purposes:

- ❖ To appease,
- ❖ To increase,
- ❖ To overcome, or
- ❖ Tame by forceful means.

The beads used to count mantras intended to appease should be crystal, pearl or mother of pearl, and should be clear or white in color. A rosary for this purpose should have one hundred such beads. Mantras counted on these beads serve to clear away obstacles, such as illness and other calamities, and purify oneself of unwholesomeness.

The beads used with mantras intended to increase should be of gold, silver, copper or lotus seeds, and a rosary is made of 108 of them. The mantras counted on these serve to increase lifespan, knowledge and merit.

The beads used with mantras which are intended to overcome are made from a compound of ground sandal wood, saffron and other fragrant substances. There are twenty-five beads on this rosary. The mantras counted on them are meant to tame others, but the motivation for doing so should be the pure wish to help other sentient beings and not to benefit oneself.

The beads used to recite mantras aiming at subduing beings through forceful means should be made from raksha seeds or human bones in a string of sixty. Again, as the purpose should be absolutely altruistic, the one person capable of performing such a feat is a Bodhisattva motivated by great compassion for a being who can be tamed through no other means, for example extremely malicious spirits, or general afflictions, visualized as a dense black ball.

Beads made of Bodhi seed or wood can be used for many purposes, for counting all kinds of mantras, as well as other prayers, prostration, circumambulations and so forth.

The string common to all beads should consist of nine threads, which symbolize Buddha Vajradhara and the eight Bodhisattvas. The large bead at the end stands for the wisdom which cognizes emptiness and the cylindrical bead surmounting it symbolizes emptiness itself--both symbolize having vanquished all opponents.