

SAKYONG MIPHAM RINPOCHE
1999 VAJRADHATU SEMINARY TRANSCRIPTS
TEACHINGS FROM THE SUTRA TRADITION~BOOK II
THE NINE STAGES OF CALM ABIDING
STUDY GUIDE SYLLABUS
WITH RELATED READINGS FROM
1979 VAJRADHATU SEMINARY TRANSCRIPTS
HINAYANA/MAHAYANA
VIDYADHARA CHOGYAM TRUNGPA RINPOCHE

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THE NINE STAGES OF CALM ABIDING

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this five week course is to deepen understanding of shamatha, or calm abiding meditation, as presented in the teachings on the Nine Stage of Shamatha. Texts used are sections from the 1999 Vajradhatu Seminary Transcript Sutrayana Book II, which contain in-depth teachings on the nine stages given by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche; and three chapters from the 1979 Vajradhatu Seminary Hinayana/Mahayana Transcripts which contain Vidyadhara

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's teachings on the nine stages.

This is a course for those who have established a meditation practice in their lives, and are interested in nourishing and deepening this practice. Although the material is from Vajradhatu Seminary Transcripts, this course is not a buddhist course per se, and no strictly buddhist material is included in the readings. This is a course for students of meditation, whatever their connection might be. Buddhist students should certainly take this course, but it can also be opened to others in our community who would benefit from it.

The syllabus points to the relevant readings for each class, as well as providing a selection of study questions that may be used by students in preparing for class, and/or to organize the class discussion. Many of these questions are from the exams taken by both the senior teachers and students at the 1999 Seminary.

The course includes two videotapes selected from the Sakyong's presentations at the 1999 Seminary. These are important in providing students with a sense of the environment in which these teachings took place, and in making a visual connection with the teacher. Information on ordering transcripts and tapes is included.

The goal of the first class is to organize and set a tone for the course. You can use this class to distribute transcripts and syllabi, etc. The 38-minute video introduces the topic, and gives students a visual connection with Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche.

The goal of the second class is to understand the view of shamatha, developing the aspects of mind called *trenpa*, or mindfulness, and *sheshin*, or awareness, and the three innate qualities of mind that are uncovered through shamatha practice: stability, vividness/clarity, and strength. The chart, or map, of the nine stages should be introduced. It is a good idea to have copies of this chart so students can refer to it easily as they study. Whereas some students have a hard time with this kind of chart, it is best to introduce it simply, giving just a few reference points to get started, like pointing out continents and a couple of major cities on a map. The following three classes provide a further exploration of the details of this map as the journey of the nine stages of shamatha unfolds.

The goal of the third class is to understand *ö*placement, and its obstacles and antidotes. This includes stages 1-4, and the obstacles of laziness and forgetting the instruction, and their antidotes. Of particular interest in these stages is the meditator's development of skill in working with thoughts.

The goal of the fourth class is to develop an understanding of the remaining stages of the journey, especially in terms of how the meditator understands and works with laxity and elation. Laxity and elation first enter the map of a meditator's experience in levels 3 & 4, so this discussion would best begin with a review of the process of placement. This class gives students an opportunity to confront the subtleties of what it means to be "too tight" or "too loose" in practice, and how sheshin, or presently knowing, provides an antidote to these obstacles at the heart of the meditator's journey.

The goal of the fifth class is to bring together what has been studied in the course. It includes a 30 minute video excerpted from the third talk in the 1999 Seminary on the application of shamatha, and Ôpride vs. confidence.Ô Again this establishes a visual connection with Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. If your class time is limited, you might consider playing this tape during the practice period preceding the class. The class itself should provide participants with an overview of the nine stages?in their own words as much as possible. At Seminary, the Sakyong asked students to learn the characteristics of each stage?including the experience, obstacles and related antidotes. Students found learning the distinctions between each stage invaluable in cultivating a depth of understanding that served to enrich their own practice and inform their discussions of practice with others. The discussion questions, some of which are repeated from earlier classes, have been selected to serve as a basis for an open discussion or celebratory exam, depending on your situation.

I would like to express appreciation to Michael Greenleaf for developing this course of study.

Moh Hardin

Curriculum Development Project

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THE NINE STAGES OF CALM ABIDING

SYLLABUS

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Class 5: Review & Overview of the Meditator's Journey Through The Nine Stages of Calm Abiding

CLASS 1: SHAMATHA: VIEW AND PRACTICE

This first class provides opportunity for organization, transcript and syllabus distribution, etc.

VIDEO: THE NINE STAGES OF CALM ABIDING Class Tape 1

(This tape is excerpted from the 1999 SEMINARY BOOK II, TALK 1, pp 14-20. Playing time is approximately 38 minutes.)

CLASS 2: THE NINE STAGES OF CALM ABIDING: INTRODUCTION & KEY TERMS

"What it comes down to here is that mindfulness is the aspect of the mind which is able to remain and stay focused on something. When you remain and stay focused on something, then what happens? Well, then you begin to learn about whatever it is..."

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, 1999 Sutrayana Book II, Talk 2

READINGS:

1999 TRANSCRIPTS: SUTRAYANA BOOK II -- TALK 1

"Six Requirements for Shamatha" pp. 20-24

"Objects of Meditation" pp. 24-25

1999 TRANSCRIPTS: SUTRAYANA BOOK II -- TALK 2

"Shamatha as an Innate Aspect of Mind" pp 27-29

"Shamatha & the Power of Hearing" pp 29-31

"Mindfulness (trenpa)" pp. 31-35

"Awareness (sheshin)" pp. 35-39

"Three Qualities: Stability, Vividness-clarity & Strength" pp. 40-45

Questions for Discussion:

Discuss the traditional benefits of shamatha in light of your own inspiration to practice.

Where do view and motivation arise in "The 6 Requirements for Shamatha"? Which "requirements" are essential for accomplishment in the practice?

Define inner and outer objects of meditation. How does the object relate to one's view of the practice?

What are the three qualities of fully developed mindfulness?

Differentiate sheshin and lhakthong. Discuss the three qualities of sheshin. How do they help us in the practice of the nine stages?

Explain how the experience of meditation evolves in terms of the Three Qualities of Mind. Initially, how is stability developed?

CLASS 3: CALM ABIDING: PLACING THE MIND, AND ITS OBSTACLES & ANTIDOTES

"So...in a sense what we are doing is we are learning how thoughts work. Education is beginning to happen in terms of how mind works and how concept works."

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, 1999 Sutrayana Book II, Talk 2

READINGS:

1999 TRANSCRIPTS: SUTRAYANA BOOK II -- TALK 2

"Stage One - Placement" pp. 49-50

"The Obstacle of Laziness & Antidotes to Laziness" pp. 51-55

"The Obstacle of Forgetting the Instruction & Antidote to Forgetting the Instruction: Mindfulness" pp. 55-56

"The Experience of the First Stage" pp. 56-59

Second Ñ Fourth Stages pp 59-61

Reference: Appendix X "The Nine Stages"

RELATED READINGS:

1979 HINAYANA/MAHAYANA TRANSCRIPTS Ñ

TALK 3 "Six Obstacles to Shamatha Practice"

"Laziness & Forgetfulness" pp 22-23

TALK 4 "Eight Types of Antidotes"

"Antidotes to laziness & Forgetfulness" pp. 28-30

TALK 5 "Nine Techniques for Resting the Mind in Shamatha"

"Resting the Mind, Continuously Resting, Literally Resting & Thoroughly Resting" pp 37-39

Questions for Discussion:

Describe the process of "Placement". How do Placement and "Engaging through Concentration" set a "clean tone" for our meditation?

Discuss the 3 kinds of laziness and their 4 antidotes. What is laziness an obstacle to?

Discuss the 2nd obstacle - Forgetting the Instruction and its antidote - Mindfulness - in the context of view. What role could daily practice play?

Discuss the First Experience. How could laziness be an obstacle here?

Describe the 2nd and 3rd stages. How is the meditator learning to work with thoughts?

Why is the beginning of the Fourth Stage a "monumental moment" in the meditator's journey? What analogies are used to describe the meditation at this stage?

CLASS 4: CALM ABIDING: STAGES FIVE Ñ NINE, THE OBSTACLES OF
LAXITY &
ELATION, AND THE ANTIDOTE OF ÔPRESENTLY KNOWINGÕ

"One thing about learning the Dharma is that it is not meant to make us feel smaller or feel that we are further away from our objective. But it is understanding the process. I always feel that it gives me more confidence to know how each step is completely laid out in a very straightforward way. So you have a feeling of not just wandering."

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, 1999 Sutrayana Book II, Talk 2

READINGS:

1999 TRANSCRIPTS: SUTRAYANA BOOK II -- TALK 2

"Laxity and Elation (chingwa and gupa)" pp. 46-48

Stages Five - Nine" pp. 61-66

Reference: Appendix X, "The Nine Stages"

RELATED READINGS:

1979 HINAYANA/MAHAYANA TRANSCRIPTS

TALK 3 "Six Obstacles to Shamatha Practice"

"Drowsiness & Depression, Wildness, Carelessness, and No Coordination" pp 23-25

TALK 4 "Eight Types of Antidotes"

"Antidotes to Drowsiness, Depression, Carelessness, and Not Being Able to Coordinate the Whole Thing" pp 30-31

TALK 5 "Nine Techniques for Resting the Mind in Shamatha"

"Taming, Pacifying, Thoroughly Pacifying, One-pointedness, and Resting Evenly" pp 39-41

Questions for Discussion:

How are the obstacles of laxity and elation experienced in stages Three - Seven? Which represents the first obstacle to mindfulness?

Discuss laxity and elation in relationship to the Three Qualities of Mind.

As a practitioner, relate your understanding and experience of "not too tight, not too loose" to the discussion of laxity and elation. In your experience, how can shesshin (awareness, introspection or presently knowing) serve as an antidote?

CLASS 5: REVIEW & OVERVIEW OF THE MEDITATOR'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE NINE STAGES OF CALM ABIDING

This class may take the form of a review & discussion, or a celebratory exam.

VIDEO: THE NINE STAGES OF CALM ABIDING Class Tape 2

(This tape is excerpted from the 1999 SEMINARY BOOK II, TALK 3, pp 71-74. Playing time is approximately 35 minutes.)

READINGS:

REVIEW

1999 TRANSCRIPTS: SUTRAYANA BOOK II -- TALK 3

"Shamatha: Applying the Nine Stages" pp 70-74

Questions for Discussion:

Discuss the traditional benefits of shamatha in light of your own inspiration to practice.

Define inner and outer objects of meditation. How does the object relate to one's view of the practice?

Discuss trenpa. What are the three qualities of fully developed mindfulness?

Differentiate sheshin and lhakthong. Discuss the three qualities of sheshin. How do they help us in the practice of the nine stages?

Describe the process of "Placement". Why is it important to withdraw from sense perceptions? Discuss how the meditator learns to work with thoughts through the first four stages.

Why is the beginning of the Fourth Stage a "monumental moment" in the meditator's journey? What analogies are used to describe the meditation at this stage?

Explain how the experience of meditation evolves in terms of the Three Qualities of Mind. At what stage are the Three Qualities of Mind fully present?

Discuss laxity and elation in terms of the Three Qualities of Mind.

As a practitioner, relate your understanding and experience of "not too tight, not too loose" to the discussion of laxity and elation. In your experience, how can sheshin (awareness, introspection or presently knowing) serve as an antidote?

Using (1) the Six Powers, (2) the Five Experiences, (3) the Four Mental Applications and (4) the Five Obstacles & Their Antidotes as a reference, trace the practitioner's journey through the Nine Stages of calm abiding.