

Turning The Mind Into an Ally
A Five -Week Course

Table of Contents

Five Week Turning the Mind into an Ally Course.....	3
Introduction	3
Course Summary.....	4
Class 1. Beginning the Journey: The Motivation to Turn the Mind	6
Class 2. Suffering: Why We Turn the Mind	11
Class 3. Obstacles in the 9 Stages of Peaceful Abiding:	14
Class 4. Contemplation: How We Train/Turn the Mind.....	18
Class 6. The Warrior Bodhisattva: The Awakened Mind	20
On Contemplative Teaching.....	22
COURSE OUTLINE FOR STUDENTS.....	25

Five Week Turning the Mind into an Ally Course

Introduction

This document is an overview of the five-week, *Turning the Mind into an Ally* course. This course is a thorough introduction to the basic Shambhala Buddhist teachings presented by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. The main practices presented are shamatha and contemplation. It is designed for new students who have (preferably) attended the one-day TMA program. Upon registration, students should be encouraged to read at least some of the book. The class covers the following topics:

Class 1. Motivation

Class 2. Suffering

Class 3. 9 Stages of Shamatha

Class 4. Contemplation and the Four Thoughts

Class 5. Bodhicitta

There is also a recommended one-day intensive in which the class practices the shamatha and contemplation that they have learned.

This course is a clear introduction to Buddhism for people who come to the Shambhala center curious about the Buddhist teachings. It is a good follow-up for new students who have already completed the one-day TMA program, the TMA 2 contemplation practice program, Shambhala Training Level 1, or other gateway programs. In the course, students are introduced to basic themes like shamatha, samsara, suffering, contemplation, bodhicitta etc.

In this document there is provided:

1. A letter on contemplative teaching
2. An overview of the ground, path, and fruition logic of each class.
3. Detailed talk notes and outlines for each of the five classes
4. A sample hand out with suggested reading assignments for each week.
5. A sample dharma exchange if a teacher would like to have something of an exam.

The talk notes and outlines for each class are very detailed. Please use them as guidelines for a class, but do not feel constricted by them. Teachers should feel empowered to teach this material in a way that makes sense for them. The Sakyong has asked that the teachers deeply study the book *Turning the Mind into an Ally* in preparation for teaching this class. In addition, many of the talks in the book “Taming the Mind and Walking the Bodhisattva Path” are helpful. The 1999 and 2000 Sutrayana seminary transcripts are also useful. Teachers are also encouraged to include readings from the Vidyadhara and other teachers who would enhance the material covered in the course.

There is a lot of material to cover. What is most essential is that students get a basic feeling for the shamatha and contemplation practices, and how studying and practice work together. Please read the letter on contemplative teaching as a model for how to present these teachings.

Course Summary

Class 1. Beginning the Journey: The Motivation to Turn the Mind

Ground:

- We already have a view and motivation
- We bring various intentions for this course
- Both confused (suffering) and awake (basic inspiration)

Path:

- First slow down with shamatha
- Learn to notice then expand motivation
- Learning how to be honest
- Contemplating motivation teachings

Fruition:

- Motivation expands
- We can be of use to others

Class 2. Suffering: Why We Turn the Mind

Ground:

- Suffering

Path:

- examine the root of suffering
- meditation, overcome bewilderment

Fruition:

- we stop perpetuating suffering

Class 3. Obstacles in the 9 Stages of Peaceful Abiding:

How We Tame the Mind

Ground:

- we usually train the mind in distraction and suffering
- natural energy of the mind, laxity/elation

Path:

- train the mind in stability and peace
- learn to work with the energy, presently knowing

Fruition:

- peaceful abiding, stability, clarity, and strength
- move through the nine stages
- workable mind, shinjang, confidence, windhorse
- can use mind

Class 4. Contemplation: How We Train/Turn the Mind

Ground:

we are always training the mind

Path:

contemplation/using energy of mind

4 Reminders

Fruition:

train mind to rest in truth, wisdom, compassion

Class 5. The Warrior Bodhisattva: The Awakened Mind

Ground:

we experience our own suffering, then suffering of others

Path:

rouse compassion, willing to open heart

Fruition:

live in world as warrior/bodhisattva

create enlightened society

One Day Workshop. Putting it All Together

Ground:

we have been given feast of dharma

Path:

learn how to eat and digest properly,
synchronize hearing, contemplating, meditating

Fruition:

can become our own meditation instructor

Class 1. Beginning the Journey: The Motivation to Turn the Mind

Ground:

We already have a view and motivation
We have various intentions for this course
Both confused (suffering) and awake (basic inspiration)

Path:

Learn to notice then expand motivation
Learning how to be honest
Contemplating motivation teachings

Fruition:

Motivation expands
We can be of use to others

Chapter 19

Summary:

Welcome In this first class the teacher needs to welcome the students into a warm community that provides traditional teachings in a fresh, modern language with a confident sense of humor.

Contemplate After welcome, ask people to sit there and think about why they came to this class. What is their basic motivation for practicing meditation and relating to Buddhist teachings? Just sit there and close your eyes and think about it.

Instruction Begin with precise meditation instruction, reviewing the technique even if many students have already received instruction.

Motivation After contemplating, make some introductory remarks about view and motivation.

Go through the small, medium, and large motivations. (chapter 19)

Conclude with a summary of why we go over these teachings and what they have to do with meditation practice.

Discussion

Talk about next week's assignments and how to relate to study.

Dedicate merit.

Welcome

We could begin with introductory remarks on the Shambhala teachings, Kagyü/Nyingma Buddhist teachings, and Shambhala Buddhism:

Please speak about whatever your understanding is of who we are. Make it personal. Here are some suggestions:

What is Shambhala and how does it relate to Buddhism?

Shambhala Buddhism brings together the path of warriorship and the Buddhist journey. This course is an introduction to the Shambhala Buddhist path, but mostly emphasizes the Buddhist teachings of meditation, wisdom, and compassion. Both traditions converge in the practice of meditation. Ultimately, we are a community that supports joining the openness of meditation practice with our relationships, our families, our art, and our career.

Be sure to mention:

- Who are our teachers?
- What is our vision?
- What are the shrines?

Contemplate

We can begin this class by connecting with our own personal intention and inspiration to be here. Why are we interested in meditation? Why do we want to learn about Buddhist teachings?

We bring with us our own motivations that represent what we have to work with. We have certain habitual patterns or forms of suffering that we would like to deal with. This represents the wild and untrained mind. But we also have a certain inspiration, some longing for truth, sanity, and goodness. This represents our basic nature, which is always with us. This is our ordinary human inheritance of sanity calling to us. Meditation practice is a way to connect with that basic nature and also a way to tame the wild mind.

Close eyes and contemplate why they are here.

Encourage people to do this exercise, and approach the entire class, with a sense of honesty. No one can look inside their mind. Begin to develop an honest relationship with our own mind. This supports us on the journey.

Depending on time and class size, students can go around the room and say a little about why they are here. This warms up the class a bit. Make it clear that at this point, any motivation is valid and welcome. (Well, almost any.)

Precise Meditation Instruction:

We are a community that is based on meditation practice. We always combine our understanding with an actual practice so that we can experience the teachings for ourselves. Not just a theory.

It is helpful to say something pithy about the view of shamatha:

- Define shamatha: peaceful or calm abiding
- In this practice we train in placing the mind on the breath. We withdraw from other objects/distractions, gather the mind and choose the breath as our anchor.

We use the breath because:

- it is particularly good for working with wildness and distraction
- because it is soothing and rhythmic
- it is always there
- it is natural and we don't have to manipulate it

We get familiar with that which is truly natural: the stability, clarity and strength of the mind abiding in peace.

We also recognize and observe the patterns of our thoughts and emotions.

We are usually surprised when our mind is content, but in meditation we see that the true nature of the mind peaceful

This practice reveals our human inheritance of sanity and basic goodness

Can use the stable, clear, and strong mind of shamatha for:

- Daily life (health, work, relationships, sports etc.) or for walking a spiritual path like Shambhala Buddhism
- Any spiritual practice depends on being present enough to do it, Shamatha is the first step

This practice is the ground we need in order to develop ourselves - basic health, maturity, and appreciation of life

After some brief remarks—

“Check in” with oneself. How am I feeling? Tired, anxious, agitated, alert etc? How is my body? This enables us to be honest and aware of our present state of being before we sit.

It is helpful to have students stand up, stretch, and connect with the body before they sit.

Next, give precise shamatha instruction on the three aspects of the practice:

- Posture (body)
- Placement on the breath as object (speech)
- Working with thoughts, labeling (mind)

Give the instructions in a slow, meditative tone and with a lot of space to experience shamatha.

Sit for ten-twenty minutes depending on time and energy in the room.

Either introduce walking meditation or invite students to stand up and stretch.

Motivation

Earlier in the class, students were asked to contemplate their motivation for being in the class and learning about meditation. Contemplating motivation is a traditional way to begin study and practice. It enables us to be honest about our intentions and begin to connect the teachings with our own experience.

Motivation refers to the underlying inspiration behind even the most subtle acts, even scratching an itch. Why do we do what we do? Looking at our motivation also refers to our basic inspiration for going on the journey of meditation, compassion, and wisdom.

We all have our own motivation already, before we come to this class. Our motivation is based on a certain view, or understanding about who we are and what the world is, and what we are supposed to get out of life.

There are traditional teachings on motivation. Teacher: see chapter 19 of TMA and for further information see 1999 Hinayana Seminary Transcripts talk 1. These teachings of small, middle, and large motivation are not so much a ladder of progressive motivations that we are trying to climb. Rather they are a way for us to stop and honestly examine where we are. Some days will be different from others.

Small motivation:

Broken into small of small, medium of small, and large of small

(It might be easier to just talk about 5 different motivations instead of sizes)

- Small of small:
This is the “Have a nice day approach.” Here we think of ourselves as a real and separate individual. We basically go through life trying to have a nice day, to get what we want and get rid of what we don’t want. This can include taking care of our immediate family and friends. This is an opportunity to talk about ego attempts to create security and cocoon.
- Medium of the small:
Here, we use spiritual practices like yoga, meditation, or Buddhist studies in order to have a nice day. This is really spiritual materialism; here is an opportunity to talk about how ego can co-opt the spiritual journey for its own purposes. Meditating just to “feel better” or define oneself as a meditator and collect that credential.
- Large of the small:
Using spiritual practices to extend our experience of having a nice day into the future. This could be preparing for old age and retirement and wanting to be happy then. In traditional Buddhist cultures this meant making offerings and so forth to have a good re-birth in the next life. This is a larger motivation in the sense that we are not just thinking about me right now, but we are preparing for our death.

Medium Motivation:

Here we see through the entire game of ego. We recognize that searching for pleasure and security is the source of suffering altogether. This is the motivation of renunciation, or the motivation for complete liberation, not just a really nice day. This is the hinayana motivation of the arhat.

Large Motivation:

Ultimately we see through attachment to the self and open our hearts to the boundless motivation of compassion. We move through life with the driving inspiration to free all beings from suffering and create a sane society.

Conclude with a summary of why we go over these teachings and what they have to do with meditation practice.

Our ability to tame the mind and integrate the teachings into our daily experience is intimately connected with our motivation. The vastness of our experience and realization depends on the vastness of our motivation.

It is important to reflect on our own motivation because we can start where we are, instead of fantasizing about where we think we should be. It is honest and healthy to take care of our family, and ourselves; we need that healthy ground to start the journey. But ultimately, these teachings lead us way beyond an attempt to shop for personal pleasure or security.

Try to leave as much time for discussion as possible.

Describe next week's assignment: Keep a journal of any experiences that are not suffering. You don't need to go into detail, leave it up to the students to think about what that means. Also, always highly recommended to sit for at least ten minutes a day.

Explain the Dedication of Merit.

Class 2. Suffering: Why We Turn the Mind

Ground:

- suffering
- The attempt to create our personal “Goldilocks zone”

Path:

- examine the root of suffering
- meditation, overcome bewilderment

Fruition:

- we stop perpetuating suffering

Chapter 2

Summary:

Welcome remarks: Joining View and Meditation

The over all emphasis of this course is bringing together our understanding of the teachings and our meditation practice so that we can integrate the teachings into our life.

Contemplate motivation for being here tonight.

Review meditation instructions and sit.

Discuss journal assignment

Bewilderment and Suffering: Why are we interested in meditation practice in the first place? Why do we want to or need to turn the mind?

Discussion

Next week’s assignment

Dedication of Merit.

Joining View and Practice

We already have a view and motivation. We talked about motivation last week. For tonight we read about bewilderment and suffering. Tonight we will talk about how we habitually hold our mind to the view of self, and how this is a major cause of suffering. In essence, this class describes the view behind a selfish motivation.

Define VIEW—Our basic understanding of who we are and what reality is.

Buddhism has its own view. We are learning to examine our personal view and see if the Buddhist view makes sense in our own experience.

Meditation practice enables us to integrate the view of dharma into our life. We can see the activity of our wild minds in meditation and learn to see the deeper truths of basic goodness, wisdom, and compassion.

If we just have the view it is like just having eyes for a journey. We can take in the landscape, but we cannot actually go anywhere. We can read and talk about dharma all our life and not go anywhere. The practice is like the legs that will take us forward. But if we just have legs, we will stumble around as if we were blind. We cannot just throw ourselves onto the meditation cushion and expect magic to happen. We need to join our understanding (view) with our practice. This gives us the support that we need to make this journey and gives us confidence that we can know what we are doing.

We need a good foundation. Shamatha is a good starting point because it enables us to slow, down and get perspective. If our mind cannot stay still and is not supple enough, we will have difficulty receiving teachings.

Contemplate

Just as before, we can connect with our basic motivation for being here. Why do we want to learn about the Buddhist meditation tradition?

Review shamatha instructions and sit

Discuss journal assignment

After walking meditation, shamatha yoga, or a quick stretch, the teacher can open up discussion of the assignment. Did anyone find things that were not suffering?

Bewilderment and suffering.

At an appropriate break in the conversation, begin a talk on the Buddhist understanding of suffering. You can draw from the lists that describe suffering that were in the reading:

From Pema reading;

The four noble truths: the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause, the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path.

- Good to emphasize the “affirmative” quality of the first noble truth: we think that we are always getting to wrong and that is why we suffer, but actually, the Buddha is saying this is part of being alive, part of being a human.
- The Four Noble Truths can be presented as a doctor (Buddha) working with a patient (us):

Diagnosis: Suffering is the illness

Cause: Where is this illness coming from? Selfish desire, view and motivation.

Prognosis: Will I survive? Yes, there is a cure. There is an end to suffering.

Remedy: The medicine for suffering is the Noble 8-Fold Path

- The four marks: impermanence, suffering, selflessness, and peace. (pg 12)

It is also helpful to define suffering as the three types of suffering: see Myth of Freedom pgs. 9-12

1. The suffering of suffering

2. The suffering of change
3. All-pervasive suffering

What is samsara? What is a samsaric mind? (pg 13)

- The constant sense of searching around the corner for something else: “Just one more thing.”
- Goldilocks Zone (pg. 20)
 - This is like the “cocoon”
 - Describe the sense of working hard to line up everything so that we feel happy, and when they don’t line up we suffer
 - We are afraid, and overwhelmed by hope and fear
 - We work to draw in what will make us happy, fend off what causes us pain, and we ignore the rest, this is what most of us consider pleasurable
 - This is the “have a nice day” approach which is very confining

There is another way to live: we can learn to connect with our basic goodness

We can directly experience bewilderment and suffering when we encounter our wild minds on the meditation cushion: It seems impossible to just stay present and be content. We are always clinging to thoughts and concepts and story lines that we think will make us happy.

Use whatever example or stories or teachings have been most helpful to you.

The main point is to clarify what Buddhists mean by suffering and samsara and establish the reason why we do need to tame the mind and go on this journey.

By seeing clearly the truth of suffering and its causes, we can begin to understand how we perpetuate suffering. Then we can bring it to an end, for ourselves and for others.

Discussion

In the discussion, make sure that the question of Buddhism being a negative or depressing religion comes up. Is it depressing or just pointing out something that we all experience? Also, see if it is clear how these teachings relate to meditation practice.

Next week’s assignment:

Sit every day for at least ten minutes. Examine your experience and see if the readings and teachings affect your shamatha practice. How does that work? Just begin to notice how view and practice work together.

Class 3. Obstacles in the 9 Stages of Peaceful Abiding:

How We Tame the Mind

Ground:

- we usually train the mind in distraction and suffering
- natural energy of the mind, laxity/elation

Path:

- train the mind in stability and peace
- learn to work with the energy, presently knowing

Fruition:

- peaceful abiding, stability, clarity, and strength
- move through the nine stages
- workable mind, shingon, confidence, windhorse
- can use mind

Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11

Summary:

Review: How the teachings of motivation, suffering, and meditation combine together in view and practice

Shamatha: Gathering the mind

Sit

Overview of 9 Stages: This is a broad overview, as this material is covered in detail in other places. The main idea is to paint a picture of the journey of shamatha.

Nine Stages: Obstacles and Antidotes: Can present these obstacles and antidotes while reviewing the nine stages to give a sense of a story: “This is what you might encounter here” etc. Emphasize the obstacles and antidotes to the first four stages: in the book: Chapters 8-10

Just beginning: Why the 9 stages are still samsaric, and pre-Buddhist

Discussion

Next week’s assignment

Dedication of Merit

Review

Could begin by asking students to close their eyes and contemplate motivation. Then quickly go through the levels of motivation. Then, with students still sitting with eyes closed, the teacher could go over some of the highlights of the suffering course: for example, what are the four noble truths or the 3 kinds of suffering. This starts the class on a settled note and reviews previous topics.

These teachings all work together to impact our meditation practice. The more we understand about suffering and our underlying view, the more inspiration and support we have for going on the journey of meditation. It is easy to let the habits of wild mind run rampant if we do not clearly understand and really *feel* these teachings. We are talking about our mind, and our life. Meditation enables us to directly experience the root of suffering in our own mind and our own approach to life. At the same time, the teachings are opening up the possibility that there is a different way to live. We do not just have to chase after hopes and fears and live a life hiding in our cocoon, searching for the goldilocks zone. We can be more brave than that. Shamatha meditation enables us to tame the mind and experience the stability, clarity, and strength that are always available to us.

Shamatha: Gathering the Mind

Briefly describe notion of gathering. (Don't take too much time on the concentric circles chart. This material is covered in the one-day TMA workshop.)

- Usually mind is scattered, as if approaching a tree filled with birds and the birds scatter in all directions.
- In shamatha we gather the mind: we gather sense perceptions and thoughts.
- We place our mind as a whole on the breath.

“Gathering the mind is a gradual process. We can imagine the mind’s activity as circles of light radiating outward. Peaceful abiding is like taking the dispersed light and gathering it into ourselves. As we gather it closer, it grows brighter. The outermost circle represents our daily life. AS we move in toward the center, we work with different levels of thoughts- from the gross to the subtle. The light grows gradually more focused. The pointing the middle of the circle represents the fortitude and clarity that underlie the wildness of our scattered mind.”-TMA pg. 59

Sit:

Overview of Nine Stages (Chapter 11)

1. Placement

- Placement refers to the act of placing the mind on the object
- Deliberately withdraw our mind from distractions and place it on the breath.
- Mind is like a waterfall.
- Main obstacle is laziness: not even making it to the cushion (Chapter 8)
- Antidotes are: Suppleness, Trust, Aspiration, and Effort

2. Continual Placement

- Able to rest our mind for a longer period of time on the breath, we are “continually in placement”.
- Mind is like a (slightly slower) waterfall.
- Main obstacle is forgetting the instructions (Chapter 9), sitting on the cushion but not really engaging the technique.
- Antidote: Remembering the instructions (how surprising!)
- Emphasize that the more we understand the view, the more supported we are in remembering the technique.

3. Repeated Placement

- Occasionally a thought breaks out in the mind and we need to bring the mind back to the breath, we do this repeatedly.
- Mind like a mountain stream.
- Main obstacle is gross elation (Chapter 10)
- Antidote: sheshin. Describe sheshin with the analogies of the “spy” and the “sheriff” (pg 55)

4. Close Placement

- A milestone on the journey: the mind never wanders from the object at all, ever. The naturally tendency of the mind has shifted from tending toward wildness to tending toward shamatha.
- Mind like a slow moving river.
- Main obstacle is gross laxity (Chapter 10)
- Antidote: sheshin

5. Taming

- Deepening the experience of shamatha. Joyous and harmonious.
- Mind is like a -----
- Main obstacle: Subtle laxity (Chapter 10)
- Antidote: sheshin

6. Pacifying

- Sense of clarity in the practice, making adjustments with ease instead of struggle.
- Mind is like -----
- Main obstacle subtle elation (chapter10)

7. Thoroughly pacifying

- Our meditation is so strong that thoughts dissolve on their own. We seduce them.
- Mind is like a-----
- Main obstacle-----
- Antidote-----

8. One-pointed

- a. Almost perfect meditation, but we still need a slight effort.
- b. Mind is like a-----
- c. Main obstacle: Not applying the antidotes
- d. Antidote

9. Equanimity

- a. Meditation is perfected, effortlessly peaceful.
- b. Mind is like a still, vast ocean or a mountain
- c. Main obstacle: Overapplying the antidotes.

Antidote: Relax

Relating to the Nine Stages:

We do not need to achieve the ninth stage of shamatha. What is important is to develop enough shamatha, enough stability in our own life, in order to work with our mind.

We continually strengthen shamatha as we do any kind of meditation practice, even visualization. Most of us are on the first or second stage. There are meditation practices that help us to use our wild mind as part of the path, so don't worry.

Discussion:

This can really be a chance for students to discuss the obstacles that they personally encounter on the cushion as well as a discussion of the 9 stages.

Next week's assignment:

Choose one of the contemplations and try working with it based on the reading.

Dedication of Merit

Class 4. Contemplation: How We Train/Turn the Mind

Ground:

- we are always training the mind

Path:

- contemplation/using energy of mind
- 4 Reminders

Fruition:

- train mind to rest in truth, wisdom, compassion

Chapters 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 (can assign 12, 13, and then student can pick another)

Summary:

Joining view and practice

Contemplation Talk: Prajna

4 Thoughts Discussion

Stretch, Sit, Contemplate 4 Thoughts Successively

Discussion

Dedication of Merit

Joining View and Practice

The essence of the path of hearing, contemplating, and meditating is learning how to join view and practice. The question is: How do we learn to transform a “teaching” or words that we read or hear about into an actual experience of direct insight that we can embody in our life.

We have already learned about the view of suffering that we already hold. Now we will learn about the view of dharma and begin to incorporate it into our life.

The teachings and the words from the tradition are not to be kept separate from meditation practice. Instead we can learn to have a meditation practice that is infused with the dharma.

Contemplation

Based on chapter 12

Instead of resting the mind on the object of the breathing, we pick a certain phrase or word and rest our mind on it. (See appendix 2 for instructions on contemplation) Then we think about, and use our

intelligence to understand that word. When a meaning or feeling begin to come through, we rest our mind on that meaning and can let the words go. At any point, we can return to the breathing shamatha if it gets too much.

Having tamed the wild horse of the mind with shamatha, we do not just beat the energy out of that horse, we learn to ride it. The mind of shamatha is the necessary groundwork to be able to penetrate into the meaning of the teachings and the world itself.

The Buddha, and all the teachers of the past have left clues for us to follow. They are the words of the teachings. But those words can be cliché phrases like “compassion” or abstract ideas like “emptiness” unless we learn to experience those words. The practice that enables us to do that is called contemplation.

Through contemplation we can bring heart to our study, and synchronize mind and body. There is a kind of “sacred study” where the teachings come to life for a practitioner.

The Four Thoughts

A good example for topics to contemplate are the “Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind Toward the Dharma”

TMA is organized differently than the usual four thoughts. Traditionally the four are:

1. Precious human birth
2. Impermanence and death
3. Karma
4. The suffering of samsara

The four are said contain the basic attitude of the hinayana: They are a way to contemplate the truths of suffering and why we would be inspired to practice, in other words, they help to turn our mind toward the dharma.

Read about:

#1 in Chapter 13

#2 in chapters 14,15,16

#3 in chapter 17

#4 in chapter 17 and chapter 2

It might be useful to briefly describe one and then spend five minutes contemplating that thought.

A teacher could experiment with giving pithy talks about the thought, and then practicing contemplation with it.

Or, the teacher might give a talk about all four, have some discussion, then maybe take a stretching break, do some shamatha on the breath, and then contemplate the four thoughts.

Discussion

Dedication of Merit

Class 6. The Warrior Bodhisattva: The Awakened Mind

Ground:

- we experience our own suffering, then suffering of others

Path:

- rouse compassion, willing to open heart

Fruition:

- live in world as warrior/bodhisattva
- create enlightened society

Chapters 18 and 21

1. Bodhicitta Through intimacy with our own suffering we see the suffering of others. A natural sense of compassion and lovingkindness emerges. This is Bodhicitta or awakened heart.
2. Rousing Bodhicitta We can practice rousing or expanding the Bodhicitta as a meditation practice.
3. Practice and discussion.
4. 6 paramitas and warrior in the world The way Bodhicitta, and all of the teachings of meditation and contemplation, manifest in the world is through the 6 paramitas. Through enacting these 6 perfections in the world we can live in the world as spiritual warriors.

Bodhicitta

From our own experience of meditation and insight into suffering we begin to feel empathy for the suffering of others.

We feel a wish that others be free from suffering (compassion) and experience joy (love).

This is a real experience of Bodhicitta, or “awakened heart”

Bodhicitta is our true nature, the softness and openness that is always with us, beneath all of the bewilderment and suffering.

Bodhicitta is in harmony with the true nature of reality, instead of the selfish motivation to “have a nice day” which is actually bewildered. Bodhicitta is the natural result of having the view of dharma.

Rousing Bodhicitta

Emphasize equanimity and the sense of vulnerability and openness that this practice might generate.

- How to work with sadness and broken heart is essential here.
- How to work with emotions that are stirred up

We can practice rousing or expanding Bodhicitta as a meditation practice.

This involves a fundamental change of attitude: learning to meditate on others instead of ourself.

Just like other contemplations, we need a good strong foundation in shamatha:

- we begin with some sitting.
- Then we generate the wish of love and compassion for someone we love.
- Slowly, we expand the circle of our contemplation to include neutral people, enemies, and all beings. (This is the traditional 4 Immeasurables practice.)

Practice and discussion

Practice for short periods and discuss people's experiences.

Six paramitas and warrior in the world

The way Bodhicitta, and all of the teachings of meditation and contemplation, manifest in the world is through the 6 paramitas. Through enacting these 6 perfections in the world we can live in the world as spiritual warriors.

1. Generosity: The treasure of the warrior.
2. Discipline: The eyes of the warrior.
3. Patience: The saddle of the warrior.
4. Exertion: The armor of the warrior.
5. Meditation: The horse of the warrior.
6. Prajna: The sword of the warrior.

The question that we all ask is: how can I bring all these teachings and practices into my life? One clear answer is by working with the 6 paramitas in the world.

- The six paramitas are based on the view of wisdom and compassion and practicing them in the world strengthens our understanding of the view. So it is a cycle: training in the paramitas deepens our view and having the view enables us to enact the six paramitas in the world.

Dedication of Merit

On Contemplative Teaching

By Acharya Adam Lobel

The way that we teach is just as important as what we teach.

The formal practice of contemplation is a powerful method that can transform the way that we think about teaching a class. The Sakyong has been emphasizing contemplation practice in the past few years as a way to bring our studies into our experience. Contemplation, as described in Mipham Rinpoche's book "Turning the Mind into an Ally," is a specific meditation that brings together study and practice. The basic instruction is to rest our mind on a topic and let the meaning of that topic penetrate into our experience. Contemplation practice synchronizes body and mind and joins together view and practice. We should consider contemplative meditation a central aspect of studying and teaching in Shambhala.

We can organize our classes around the practice of contemplation. Normally, we think of two separate sections of a class meeting: first a period of meditation and then a talk and discussion. This is helpful in that enables us to rest our mind and slow down before a talk. With contemplative teaching, we can integrate practice and study *throughout* our class meeting. We might begin with the clarity and simplicity of a short meditation period. Then there could be an introductory talk on a specific theme, say selflessness. This presentation would need to be precise and clear. Questions about the topic should be addressed. Then, we could do a short period of contemplation practice on selflessness. We might guide the class to rest our minds on the word "selflessness" and see if we can "crack the nut of the word" and let the meaning come through. We might ask students to look for the self, in this case we would do investigative contemplation and rest the mind on the question, "Where is the self?" We might do a specific contemplation and look for the self in the body, or look for the self in thoughts, or we could investigate all five skandhas. These are examples of how contemplation can be at the very center of a class.

This example assumes that the practice of contemplation has already been clearly presented as its own topic. The teacher needs to explain how and why to do contemplation, focusing on the technique. Chapter 12 in "Turning the Mind into an Ally" could be the basis for such a presentation.

It is easy for a topic like selflessness to sound abstract or challenging. Contemplation practice demands that a student encounter the teaching in their own body, in their own lives. We can guide students to ask themselves, “When have I experienced a sense of self, or a sense of selflessness?” This takes the “word” or topic that we are presenting out of the tradition and places it directly within the realm of students lived experience. We could even investigate, “Why is studying the self meaningful to me?” This could of course be used for any topic, like Bodhicitta, basic goodness, fear, emptiness, devotion, bliss etc. After the period of contemplation, there could be a discussion based on what people encountered during their practice. There could be a concluding talk that brings together the theme.

Including contemplation helps us organize a class meeting. Instead of just trying to explain a topic, we have to consider how to bring it into the practice and lives of our students. We might plan a talk and consider what themes could be contemplated. These of course, are often the themes that students will remember, because they have had to chew on them and make them real. Even brand new students can relate to guided contemplations.

Contemplation practice also slows down the pace of a class meeting. Instead of having a separate practice period and then a lecture packed with concepts, students have a chance to integrate their practice with the concepts. This creates the opportunity for the topic that we are presenting to go beyond a mere concept and become meaningful. We must remember, that as the world speeds up, our students have less and less time to practice and contemplate at home. The class meeting at the Shambhala center might be their one island of sanity in a chaotic and difficult week. We can offer to such students (and to ourselves) a class that is truly contemplative, in that we seamlessly weave teachings and practice together. For some students, they can then bring the contemplation practice into their lives. In this way, we can encourage our students to delve into the material in our courses in a personal way.

Contemplation practice is only successful if it is based on the ground of shamatha. This refers to the actual practice of calm abiding as well as to a sane or healthy environment. We must therefore create a container to allow the space for contemplative learning. The Shambhala forms help us to create the proper atmosphere for contemplative studies. We can arrange a space that draws down blessings and drala through lhasangs, ikebana, and basic principles of the dharma arts. All of these skillful means can be used to create a situation for contemplative studies.

Our classes in Shambhala can embody the sense of humour, joy, and heart of the teachings. We can think of creating a contemplative class as an art form. How can we best express the dharma in a way that the meaning and the *feeling* of the teachings fill the very space? How can we guide our students to taste the juice of whatever we are presenting? The longing of the bodhisattva warrior is to open the hearts of beings with the beauty and power of the dharma.

TURNING THE MIND INTO AN ALLY

COURSE OUTLINE FOR STUDENTS

CLASS 1:

Beginning the Journey: The Motivation to Turn the Mind

- Shamatha instruction

Reading (for next class):

- TMIA: Chapter 2
- Wisdom of No Escape: Chapter 9
- Optional: Myth of Freedom (Suffering) pg7-12

First Assignment:

- Find something in your life that is not suffering
- Always assigned: Sit every day for at least 10 min.

CLASS 2:

Suffering: Why We Turn the Mind

- Shamatha focus: Knowing what we're doing

Reading (for next class):

- TMIA: Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11 (11 is most important)
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Second Assignment:

- Focus on precise shamatha, examine how studying the teachings affects the experience of shamatha.
- Always assigned: Sit every day for at least 10 min.

CLASS 3:

Obstacles to peaceful abiding: How we tame the mind

- Shamatha focus: gathering the mind

Reading:

- TMIA: Chapter 12, 13 and pick one or two others
- Always assigned: Sit every day for at least 10 min.

CLASS 4:

Contemplation: How we train the mind

- Shamatha focus: Mindfulness and presently knowing

Reading:

- TMIA: Chapter 18 and 21
- When Things Fall Apart

CLASS 5:

The Warrior Bodhisattva: The Awakened Mind of Compassion

- Shamatha Focus: The rock and the flower

Reading: TMIA: Chapter 20

ONE DAY WORKSHOP: Meditation Intensive: Putting it all Together