

Columbus KTC

Introduction to Meditation



An affiliate Tibetan Buddhist meditation and study center under the guidance of
Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, seat of His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa in North America
231 South Grubb Street • Columbus, Ohio 43215 • Phone: 614-228-6546



KARMA THEGSUM CHÖLING

Columbus, Ohio

Dear Friends:

Thank you for visiting the Columbus Karma Thegsum Chöling. On behalf of all the members and friends of Columbus KTC, I convey to you our appreciation.

You are welcome to visit us again in the future. We have regular sitting meditation sessions at 10 a.m. and classes in Buddhism at 11:30 a.m. every Sunday. Should you wish to become a member of the Friends of KTC or a member of the KTC community, you also will receive the benefit of using our library of hundreds of titles on Buddhism and meditation.

Enclosed, you will find some information about the basic sitting meditation practice, which you are welcome to take home and study. If you have questions about meditation or Buddhism, feel free to call our center at (614) 228-6546 and leave a message. Either myself or another KTC meditation instructor will contact you and try to help with any questions you may have.

If you have not yet signed up to be on our mailing list, please make sure you do so next time you visit. The KTC has many events planned for the coming months, and we'd like for you to know about them in advance!

Spiritual practice, according to the Buddhist tradition, is a form of getting to know oneself, and thus getting to know others, too. We welcome your interest and your openness, and hope to see you again!

Best wishes to you on your Path,

Kathy Wesley
Resident teacher, Columbus KTC

Welcome Packet – Part 2 of 7

The Seven Positions: Building the Meditation Posture

An excerpt from a teaching by the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche

The sutras say we should settle ourselves on a comfortable seat where we do not have to lean to the left or right or too far forward or backward. That kind of leaning could result in imbalances in the workings of our physical systems or in our body's constitution.

Then, with this comfortable, even seat, we need what is traditionally called "tingngedzin burchon." "Tingngedzin" means samadhi or meditation, and "burchon" means cushion – meditation cushion. Traditionally, in Tibet, meditators would use a square meditation cushion which was four to five fingers high. Depending on the proportions of a person's body, some may need it to be a little lower or a little higher.

Then, sitting on the cushion with it more to your rear than to your front, bring the body to the best possible position, as described below.

After having taken your seat, place your legs, if possible, in the vajra, or the full-lotus, position. This is not an easy position, and if you are not used to it, then the regular cross-legged position, the sattva, or half-lotus position, is suitable. Because of the differences in gender, there are subtle differences in the constitution of our physical systems. Therefore, men are instructed to sit with the right foot out and the left inside, and women with the left foot out and the right foot inside, creating a situation for balance. The full-lotus and half-lotus positions are referred to as the "positions of indestructibility," in the sense of being stabilized or grounded. This is the first position of the body.

The second position of the body is called "drawing up." After having sat in the cross-legged position, adjust the position of the body to bring in, or fold in, the buttocks. Then, close and tighten the sphincter muscles, and with a certain amount of effort and, without breathing, pull the abdomen and the inside organs upward. Then, very gently and slowly relax everything back into its normal position.

Right now we are talking about how to facilitate an effective taming of the mind from the external point of view. This particular position, for instance, contributes to our health and toward maintaining the vitality and warmth of the body. This definitely contributes toward strengthening and taming the mind.

The third position is to touch the tip of the thumb on each hand to the [first or second] joint of the ring finger on each hand, and then close the fingers into a relaxed and gentle fist and bring the fists, palms downward, onto the knees.

Depending on what kind of position you are able to maintain naturally, the important point is that your back is erect and your knees are down on the ground as much as possible. If this is already pretty well established and you have these positions correct, then you should not have to exert any effort, but just keep your elbows and arms straight. This has more to do with keeping the structure

of the bones erect, rather than having tension in your flesh, skin or muscles, which should remain pretty normal. Only the bone structure is kept erect.

But, if your back is not very straight and you have problems in bringing your knees down, then exerting a little effort and straightening your arms will help eventually to bring the knees down a little closer toward the ground, which will keep your back erect.

For the fourth position, you may notice that even when your arms are straight, there is still a possibility that your back is curved or that you are slouching, perhaps because your hands have gone a little bit over your knees. If this is the case, as you continue sitting, you will get more and more out of position and slouch more and more, even though your arms still straight. If this happens, then you should straighten your spine. Maintaining a straight and erect position in this way is very important.

The fifth position concerns the neck and the head. Even if your back up to the point of the neck is erect, your neck still may be tilted left or right or backward or forward. So, without making an effort to look cross-eyed, focus both of your eyes onto the nose and from there bring the focus of the eyes down a straight line to a point a forearm's length in front of your body. This helps to keep your neck from tilting too much backward, forward, or sideways.

The sixth position is to let your tongue rest flatly and somewhat tightly against your upper palate. Like all the other positions, this one has an immediate or temporary benefit, as well as a long-term benefit. In this particular case, the immediate benefit is that when you properly rest the tongue in this way, you do not have to go through the effort and the disturbance of swallowing again and again, and it also helps to keep you from coughing.

The seventh position of the body concerns the fact that your neck may not be properly erect because even though it is not tilted too much backward or forward, it may still be craned a little bit backward or forward. To avoid that, you should pull your chin in slightly so that there is a light pressure on the voice box. In this way, the neck vertebrae are in alignment with the spinal vertebrae. This creates a very correct and erect position.

These are the seven positions of the body and are very highly recommended in the different levels of the teachings.

Because some of us are not accustomed to these different positions, or because of the difference in flexibility of our bodies and so forth, some people may be able to do the positions better or more immediately than others. Whatever may be the differences, it is important that these positions be understood and that in our meditation practice we commit ourselves to getting into these positions as closely as possible.

What are the defects of not being in the proper positions? For instance, if we meditate all the time staring upward, at first we might feel very light and comfortable and think that this feels right in the sense of being clear. Then after a while, we feel a sense of speeding up or floating, and we are more susceptible to anger or frustration. Because of the relationship of our body and mind, poor posture could bring out these sorts of emotional patterns.

In the case of sort of slouching down, we may get a temporary feeling of comfort or relaxation, but actually we are not taming the mind in a disciplined way. It is said that continuing in this way is a greater cause for ignorance. We become more and more slothful and fall asleep.

According to the way our constitution or chemistry of the body operates, we are stimulating such patterns. If while meditating we tilt to the right side more, we are more susceptible to distractions or to being entertained by the more pleasurable aspects of distractions. If we tilt to the left side, then we are more susceptible to unpleasant desires and that type of distraction. So by leaning left or right, the different aspects of distractions will increase, and we will be more susceptible to the different types of desire. So, with this understanding, the positions of the body are important.

Keeping these seven positions in mind and training properly in applying these positions are very important. If we miss one of these positions, this causes many defects in the taming of our minds. Initially, it may not be so easy and comfortable to get into these positions. It might mean suffering a little discomfort or going through a little effort, but in the long run it will definitely be more than worthwhile.

Welcome Packet – Part 3 of 7

A Discussion of Walking Meditation

An excerpt of a teaching by the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche

As most of you know, in the sutras there is mention of both sitting and walking meditation. As it is said, when you are sitting, *know* you are sitting, or *know* your sitting, actually, and when you are walking, know your walking. This is in terms of mindfulness and awareness. In the past in Tibet, walking meditation was not popular; in fact, it was not done. It was the custom then to sit cross-legged on the ground or floor. Maybe this is one of the benefits of underdevelopment. This sitting was not done with all the different positions that we have been talking about, but people just sat cross-legged. When people *were* meditating with all these specific positions and resting the mind, the feet and knees and so forth did not get tired or present any problems. So, walking meditation was not introduced or encouraged.

But now seems to be a time when the wisdom of the Buddha can be applied in many different ways. Different things are important and applicable. Now people are not used to sitting cross-legged, and when they sit for a long time, they get more dull and are bothered by pain. Instead of stopping and not doing meditation at all, it is better to do a combination of sitting and walking practice. This gives some exercise as well as some possible play of clarity for the mind. The body also gets rested, and between these, whether you are sitting or walking, the mind becomes clearer. One other important reason that walking meditation can be beneficial is that it is a closer step toward post-meditation, but without your having left the meditation at all. This takes you closer to bringing meditation, or some sense of meditative momentum, into your ordinary day-to-day life. This bridging between formal and informal practice seems to be an important step.

In doing walking meditation practice, the sutras do not specifically describe where your hand should be and how you should walk. However, from a physical point of view, to have your hands swinging at your side could be a hindrance instead of a contribution toward the tranquility of the mind. So, hold the hands in front of yourself at the level of the heart, with the palms up and the right hand on top of the left. Let the ends of the thumbs touch in the gesture of making a knot. This is also a gesture of mindfulness, in the sense of being together. This position seems to be rather appropriate with this practice. *(Editor's note: A few details were added to this description of the position of the hands since the translator apparently just visually showed the audience what to do.)*

Also, it is said that when making supplications to the buddhas and arhats, because of their dignified or sacred outlook, we move as if "walking with the gait of the crane." The buddhas and arhats are in a state of tremendous tranquility and have very dignified, well-composed outlooks. So, in this way we walk by first lifting the heel upward and then the rest of the foot on toward the tip of the toe, and then taking the step and placing the heel on the ground first and gradually the whole of the foot. In this way, we take moderate steps. In addition, as a gesture of turning the wheel, the buddhas and arhats always go in a clockwise direction, so it seems sensible and appropriate to incorporate this also. Taking steps in this way, with the right foot first and walking in a clockwise direction, is helpful in contributing toward a more wholesome and tranquil state of mind.

Walk with moderate steps at a moderate speed. If you move too slowly, then you have to concentrate too hard on your balance. You get shaky when you take too much time or lift your foot too high. And, if you walk too fast, it is not much different from the regular walking that we do. So, walk with a moderate speed.

Welcome Packet – Part 4 of 7

Dealing with Obstacles in Shamata

Excerpted from a teaching by the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche

There are two main obstacles that interfere with the effectiveness and steadiness of our meditation practice. The first one, as is said in the sutras, is the obstacle of restlessness or wildness. This happens because we are very strongly or very acutely involved with either a particular emotion, such as anger, aggression, or attachment, or with an exciting argument or physical activity.

When this is the case, you may place yourself in the meditation positions, but you don't seem to get settled; in fact, when you try to correct your positions, it makes things even worse. If you keep meditating like this, there is a possibility that gradually you will become more angry or frustrated. You try to tighten things up, but that doesn't work and you have more thoughts and get more hyper and restless and become very frustrated.

To work with this, the sutra recommends lowering your focus and relaxing your positions. Just relax, letting the head bend downward and closing the eyes very gently. Your breathing also should be very gentle. Your breath becomes very dark and very subtle and goes down into the invisible depths of the earth. Then slowly you inhale. As you inhale this dark and almost invisible breath, it is as if you were daylight and your whole being becomes darkness.

Remain in this state of darkness, repeating several times if needed. Afterward you will feel more stabilized and normal and not as involved with those wild mental patterns. Then resume the standard positions. If you apply this antidote for too long, you might fall asleep, so as soon as you feel relaxed, or normalized, get back into the positions and relate to the breath as before.

Another obstacle is sluggishness. Sometimes the place where you are meditating is warm and humid, or you are stuffed with a lot of food, or it is dark, and so forth. Maybe you have done a lot of work and are somewhat tired. Then, when you try to meditate in the normal position, you feel somehow that you are being pulled down. You have a sense of being pulled down out of your positions physically and, mentally, following the breath becomes more disconnected or vague. It is even difficult to tell if you're being distracted or not. It is almost like going into a state of oblivion.

When this kind of situation arises, it is not very effective and skillful to keep trying. At that time, shift from the regular position—your whole body, not just the bone structure. Exert some effort and straighten your position more than ever and also look upward with your eyes. It is very good if you have a light, but otherwise visualize a very bright light above you. Then imagine that your breath is in the form of a very brilliant, sharp light going out. As you inhale, it is like your whole inside is being lit like the lamp, and you want to say, "Turn off that light. I can't fall asleep." In this way, you feel more awake and more normal, physically and mentally. Then, from there you go back to the regular positions and relate to the breath as before.

These are only antidotes for these two obstacles, and you must not stay with them after you feel more normalized. Once you feel more balanced, go back to following the breath, either both outgoing and incoming or only the outgoing, whichever is best for you.

Different people experience meditation differently. For some people, meditation is initially very comfortable and pleasant. You have hardly any distractions and thoughts. But as you continue sitting, you begin to have more thoughts and you begin to feel more disorganized. This may continue to the point that, at the end of the session, you are almost frustrated with all these distractions.

Among the many possible reasons for this, one of the main ones is overexertion—working so hard on the positions and using so much effort that you become uptight. In one sense you are not paying any attention, but in another sense, in the name of concentration, you are making yourself more tense and uptight. This is not very effective or appropriate and, therefore, things do not go very well.

In this case, you need to loosen or relax your positions a bit. What we are looking for is a sense of being well composed and together, both physically and with the concentration, but also a sense of openness and of being at ease. That is important.

Other people have a different experience of meditation. For them, meditation is initially quite uncomfortable. You feel something is out of balance with the positions, and you are having quite a lot of thoughts. Then, gradually, by the end of the session you are having fewer and fewer thoughts and less of a sense of discomfort and inconvenience. Were you to continue meditation, to expand the session, that would be more than appropriate. You would welcome it.

If the meditation is taking this course, with that sense of openness and with fewer distractions, then this is generally a sign that it is happening in the proper way, and it is a matter of continuing to work on that.

One very important point is not to leave meditation practice only to the formal meditation session. After you have completed your session of practice, do not throw it away and go back into your old patterns. If you undergo this kind of drastic change, then your experience of the benefits of meditation will happen very slowly and very rarely.

So, when you have finished your formal practice, you must try to go into the work with the meditation, maybe not fully, but definitely with some element of it, some kind of momentum, some quality of it. For instance, you might go out with some mindfulness of gentleness or softness. Some people think aggressiveness is meant to be a strength, in the way of stubbornness. But to be strong, to be precise, we do not have to be aggressive. With gentleness and softness we go out into the world after meditation.

Then once in a while, whenever we can remember, we should alert ourselves to the quality of meditation or to some aspect of meditation. We do not have to go through all the positions and follow the breath, but just be with ourselves, just rest in some sense of awareness. This is very important to do as frequently as possible. You do not have to spend a long time at it or look dazed, but just for a moment to be aware. It could even be at such times as when a cup of tea is coming to your lips. It takes some time until the cup arrives. Maybe you could be aware just that time. You could also be aware when you put the cup down, or during any other sort of break.

Some sort of gap situation is always present, especially if you are in the midst of chaos, such as in a crowd and there are all kinds of things to figure out or, for instance, you are suddenly subjected to fear or apprehension. In such situations, if you could pause just for a moment, it would be like opening a whole new perspective. If there is chaos and confusion, you begin to have a sense of order or, at least, some sense of what to do and where to begin. If you are subjected to apprehension and fear, it's actually the opposite of openness. If you are involved in some kind of argument or exchange, then being able to come up with a better way of seeing is very, very helpful.

So, alert yourself to the mindfulness of doing this. If you do it time and time again, you can definitely be assured that you will have a much clearer picture of things. In this way, the meditation practice could help develop more of a sense of efficiency and precision in our daily activity, our job, career or whatever.

Welcome Packet – Part 5 of 7

Meditation: The Core of Buddhist Practice

A lecture by the Ven. Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, Ann Arbor, MI, Sept. 15, 1981

(Rinpoche welcomes everyone to the talk and expresses his happiness at having this opportunity to discuss some practical aspects of Buddhism with them.)

Buddhist teachings are very straightforward in that they lead you to recognize yourself and your capacities. Our nature is comprised of basic goodness, but how can we come to that recognition and how can we develop its proper manifestation? The potential for the recognition of goodness as our nature does not belong to certain individuals alone, or to people with specific backgrounds or origins; rather, it belongs to everyone, without exception.

We might wonder why, then, are we so dissatisfied, or why has everyone not experienced a wholly sane state of mind? That this is so has nothing to do with any lack of potential, but only with our inability to recognize it and to make use of the proper skillful means in its development. As an analogy, all seeds have a potential for growth and yet if they are not provided with fertile ground, moisture, and warmth, they cannot grow. Nevertheless, that is not because they lack the potential for growth.

In our particular cases, the reason why we have not had the opportunity to learn to recognize that basic goodness in our nature is probably twofold. First of all, due to our karma, or the patterns of cause and effect that condition our lives, we have become very remote from any connection with our own potential or with adequate skillful means. And secondly, we may not have taken advantage of any opportunity to develop our potential or skillful means because we were unable to appreciate the ultimate sanity the opportunity provided, due to our being locked into specific karmic patterns.

It is said that there have been times when, among all beings in existence, none were fully awakened. At such times, even though beings had the inherent potential to experience an awakened state of mind, the necessary auspicious circumstances were not there. At other times, there may have been awakened beings, teachers, and other opportunities to learn the skillful means necessary to self-manifest wakefulness; and yet, karmically, we were not able to connect long enough to experience a taste of sanity, and so we went astray and lost track once again.

There are many intelligent people in the world who are able to create the most undreamt of things. If there were a sane state of mind to be realized, then definitely these intelligent people would have been able to realize it. Or so we feel. But there seems to be no such realization, since there is no evidence for it at all. In truth, there is not any lack of intelligence; but rather, our intelligence has been misdirected. Instead of turning slightly inward and examining our internal state, we have become so overwhelmed by externals that we are beyond control. If there were such a thing as a returning (to ourselves), the returning would be quite difficult. When one's vision is intact, one can see everything clearly, including the most remote distance. However, when we need to see our own face, we have to use a mirror. With a mirror, if your vision is perfect, you see your face perfectly, and if your vision is imperfect, you see your reflection accordingly.

No matter how intelligent we might be, the development of a stable and sane state of mind is not something we can simply effect by ourselves. Neither strong desires, nor speculations, nor induced hallucinations will ever lead to the particular ideal state of being which we would like to have. Rather, a relationship with a spiritual friend or guide, the gradual realization of how our potential can be developed, and a turning somewhat inward—these are the conditions which have been missing.

So, many intelligent people have produced many amazing objects and theories, which are all very fine. We need not be against these things in themselves. However, the tendency is that the more we produce and the more intelligent we become, the more insatiable the desire to continue producing in spiraling circles. A pattern is developed, and with it comes frustration. No matter how intelligent one is, or what impossible creations one has produced, both frustration and a tense restlessness haunt one's being. Something is wrong. Perhaps an important fact has eluded us. Does a total dependence on the play of the phenomenal world truly embody reality? As both fear and frustration mount, a point is reached where one becomes very intelligently ignorant, and at a dead end. As one works and carries on, carries on, and carries on, there is no sense of completion, or fullness, or of finishing. One's intelligence becomes exhausted and worn out. In truth, the problem lies in not being able to turn inward and to tame and train the actual nature of the mind, rather than superficially putting together all kinds of jigsaw puzzles, so to speak.

An intelligence that has no sense of itself or its own uplifting and is completely dependent on externals never becomes a vehicle for the uprooting of negative emotional and psychological patterns. In fact, it can cause the intensification of these patterns. An intelligence directed totally to outer stimuli actually becomes a further stimulus to habitual negative patterns and confusion.

According to the Buddhist teachings, one first needs to acquire some understanding, not from an optimistic or pessimistic point of view, but from a realistic point of view. Without any bias, or excitement or disappointment, we need to frankly and bluntly make observations. It is important to listen to one's spiritual friends and guides, and to *reflect* upon what they have said. One may also want to research or look up references for what was said, in order to definitely decide whether it makes sense or not. It is not necessary to believe something because it is new, or exciting, or exotic, but it is necessary to determine what has actually been meant.

We speak of meditation practice, and there is tremendous emphasis placed on the importance of meditation practice. Nevertheless, you could not truly practice meditation without some basic understanding (of the nature of the mind and of reality). Once some knowledge has been acquired, that knowledge can be applied to oneself.

Many times there is a danger of jumping impatiently to conclusions. For instance, your having heard that something is a medicine is not enough. You also need to know what kind of medicine it is, what its purpose is, when and how it is used, and what are the stages of its use, and so forth. Simply knowing or believing that a medicine exists does not help you. As in any situation of involvement, be

it spiritual or mundane, one needs a sense of strategy, or of how things best operate. It is important to know what sort of steps need to be followed.

Many times, the failures and disappointments we experience, both in a mundane and a spiritual context, occur because we lack the patience to make a definite commitment, to do something from beginning to the end. We become infatuated, and we would like to feel differently. If nothing happens immediately, we give up. Having abandoned the project so quickly, who loses: the project or yourself? In this way, no matter how intellectual we are, what we say and what we are may become separated. This is because we did not acquire a proper understanding, appreciation, or involvement.

Any involvement begins gradually, but at some point, it has to become total. If you remain partially involved, what you learn will be partial; if you are involved totally, what you learn will be total. This is a simple point; there is nothing very mysterious about it.

What is a practical basis for one's life then? Insofar as meditation is concerned, we need a firm and thorough understanding of it. What are its preliminary stages, what obstacles might arise and how might we handle them? What kind of perspective should one have in each successive stage of meditation? Many times a person takes one step, but is not able to understand it. In that instance, it is easy to feel that no understanding can ever occur, and to consequently give up. That is a kind of self underestimation. Has one really proceeded far enough, or looked at the problem in different ways? Or is it easier to avoid those questions? There is a Tibetan term meaning "inward" or "insiders." The philosophy of the Dharma has the quality of straightening whatever is crooked and transforming any distractions into internal concentration.

It is definitely possible to come to a clear understanding of any aspect of meditation. To begin with, a meditation technique is provided and explained to each individual, so that both a method and skillful means are at one's disposal. However, the layer upon layer of habitual emotional patterns accumulated during many lifetimes are neither unraveled nor uprooted in an instant. It is as though everything is frozen, as in the winter. One day of sunshine cannot melt the ice. Yet, as spring draws near, a gradual thawing, softening, and loosening up inevitably occurs.

Our lives have become overly complicated, and we now need to exert some effort at simplification. For that reason, we need the basic meditation practice (shamata) so as to develop calmness and tranquility. Meditation will not bring instantaneous results, and yet if one has been consistent and sincere, after a year or so certain changes will have come about—changes that are beneficial to oneself, and to others. The meditator will find that he or she has contributed to the harmony of others, because a person who experiences calmness, tranquility, and an open state of mind is physically and mentally happy. This happiness extends itself to others.

Unfortunately, we either do not have the time, or do not take the time to actually practice. After a year, we may find that nothing has improved. In reality, we may have spent not more than a half an

hour or an hour a day, out of twenty-four hours, in meditation. In the rest of the twenty-three hours, we were totally entertained and distracted by the usual external involvements. So it is still said, that if we really meditate properly, hour after hour, several hours a day for at least a month—we would find a substantial change in ourselves: a change that feels solid, that really imparts a different perspective. That change is not characterized by a static excitement, but by a basic and accommodating openness.

Rinpoche would like to further emphasize the need for a clear understanding of the meditative path—of its nature and of how to learn from it. Without a clear understanding of meditation, one will not make any progress. If you are simply following your own ideas as to meditation, you will be like a person who is aimlessly wandering. Certainly, that person is walking, but where is the destination? Therefore, one must take this type of involvement seriously and quite sincerely.

Also, we must not fool ourselves and while in “meditation” enjoy being entertained by thoughts. Whenever that happens, rather than admit it was a waste of time, we may justify it by saying, “it was very relaxing.” But was it really the practice of meditation, according to the correct understanding and instructions? The truth is, it was not. For a while, it is possible to deceive and entertain oneself in that manner, but at some point, the entertainment ends. Not only does the entertainment end, but also disappointment sets in, perhaps to the degree of nearly unbalancing the practitioner. While engaged in worldly activities, this type of person might feel tossed and torn apart. Is it possible at that time to recreate the relaxation of being entertained by thoughts? It is impossible, and so there is no warmth or continuity.

The foregoing explanation of mistakes in meditative practice does not imply that any one individual has these particular faults. Rather, it is very important for everyone to know the simple facts so that a clear and correct understanding of meditation arises. This honesty is better than any flattery or praise, which might ignore the problems due to a misunderstanding of the practice of meditation.

Welcome Packet – Part 6 of 7

Shrine Room Etiquette

By Lama Kathy Wesley, based on text from Karma Triyana Dharmachakra. Last revised 4.2.01

With respect for the Buddha and the teacher guiding us on the path...

- Please rise when the lama enters the Shrine Room to teach, and when the lama rises from his or her seat after the teaching.
- Do not sit or lounge with your feet pointed toward Buddha images, paintings, or the shrine.
- You may observe Buddhists doing three prostrations to the shrine when they enter. If you are not Buddhist, do not feel obligated to bow to the shrine.

With respect for the Dharma, the teachings bearing the truth of the path...

- Please do not place texts and prayers on the floor, but rather on a cushion or held in your hand.
- Do not crumple texts and prayers or mark them with a pen.
- Do not take them with you for personal use or study without first speaking with the Chupon (Shrinekeeper), a Meditation Instructor, or the Resident Teacher (lama).

With respect for the Sangha, the fellowships of both realized beings and ordinary students...

- Please be mindful of others. When entering the Shrine Room during a teaching or meditation session, enter quietly and take the nearest available seat.
- Do not hold private conversations in the Shrine Room, particularly before and after teachings and meditation sessions. When the Shrine Room is in use, please be mindfully quiet in the rooms nearby.

Appropriate Attire

- Please do not go shirtless.
- Do not wear shoes in the practice area.
- Do not wear tank tops, short skirts, or short shorts.

Offerings

Offerings of flowers, incense, and candles are always welcome, and may be left with the Chupon (Shrinekeeper). To make lamp offerings, please see the Chupon or the table near the shrine.

Cushions

- Please return cushions when leaving the Shrine Room unless otherwise requested by the staff.

Welcome Packet – Part 7 of 7

Teaching Yourself Buddhism through Books: A Reader's Guide

By Lama Kathy Wesley. Last revised 7.20.04.

Introduction

Those new to Buddhism in America today face a delightful problem as they look to books to begin their study. More books on the subject are being printed today than ever before, but it is difficult to choose which books to read—and even more difficult to determine what order in which to read them.

This guide is an attempt to address this delightful problem. In the following pages, we will outline a course of study—call it “Buddhism 101”—based on selected books now available at local and regional booksellers.

Because our Karma Thegsum Chöling center is part of a particular tradition—the Karma Kagyu lineage, one of four lineages of Tibetan Buddhism taught in the world today—both the study outline and many of the books listed in it reflect and express this tradition.

But, it is hoped that by recommending books in a particular order (and related to a particular graded course of study), your reading will be more focused, more fruitful, and more enjoyable.

How to Choose Dharma Reading

In Buddhism, teachers emphasize what are called “The Three Disciplines”: Hearing, Contemplating, and Meditating. When practicing “Hearing,” we come in contact with the teachings, and hopefully can listen (or, in our case, read) with an open mind. This means that if we read something we do not understand or do not believe in, that we merely file these things away in our minds in baskets labeled “I do not understand this” or “I do not know whether this is true or not,” and not just judge it or reject it. Doing this allow us to take what we need from the teachings, and leave the rest behind.

Having “heard” the teachings, we now progress to the practice called “Contemplating.” What this means is that once we have read something, we need to think it over. What does this material mean for us? Do we understand it? Etc. If we have questions, we should take our questions to a teacher and talk them over. Talking things over helps us to understand the teachings and how those teachings might be applied to real life.

Then, having “contemplated,” we move to the most important discipline: “Meditating.” Once we learn about meditation, or about ethics, or compassion, we should not leave our information in our heads or on the pages of a book; we should put it into practice. It is by putting things into practice that we can actually use the dharma to transform our minds, our experience—and our lives.

If we are really lucky, our meditation will prompt us to learn more, to contemplate more, to ask more questions and to meditate more—making the process of learning dynamic, lively, and self-perpetuating. At every stage, we should feel free to talk over our questions with teachers, so they can help us internalize what we're learning.

Recommended Books

I. General Overviews (these contain both practice and philosophy)

- A. *The Three Vehicles of Buddhist Practice* by Thrangu Rinpoche
- B. *Four Foundations of Buddhist Practice* by Thrangu Rinpoche
- C. *Dharma Paths* by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche
- D. *Meditation in Action* by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche
- E. *The Dharma* by Kalu Rinpoche
- F. *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* by Gampopa (Khenpo Kunchong Gyaltzen's translation)
- G. *Myth of Freedom* by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche
- H. *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* by Chogyam Trungpa
- I. *The Essence of Buddhism* by Traleg Rinpoche

II. The Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha

A. The Life of the Buddha

1. *The Four Noble Truths and the Life of the Buddha* by Thrangu Rinpoche
2. *The Awakened One* by Sherab Chodzin Kohn

B. Dharma: Buddha's Three Vehicles (Hiniyana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana)

1. The Hiniyana

- a. Shinay Meditation
 - i. *Shamata Meditation* by Thrangu Rinpoche
 - ii. *The Wisdom of No Escape* by Pema Chodron
 - iii. *The Practice of Tranquility and Insight* by Thrangu Rinpoche
- b. Buddhist Philosophy
 - i. *The Twelve Links of Interdependent Origination* by Thrangu Rinpoche
- c. Buddhist Ethics
 - i. *Ten Virtuous Actions* by Thrangu Rinpoche
 - ii. *The Tibetan Vinaya: Rules of Buddhist Conduct* by Thrangu Rinpoche

2. The Mahayana

- a. *The Way of the Bodhisattva* by Shantideva (Padmakara Translation Group)
- b. *The Great Path of Awakening* by Jamgon Kongtrul
- c. *Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness* by Chogyam Trungpa
- d. *Start Where You Are* by Pema Chodron
- e. *Taking the Bodhisattva Vow* by Bokar Rinpoche
- f. *The 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva* by Ngulchu Thogme
- g. *The Open Door to Emptiness: A Discussion of Madhyamaka Logic* by Thrangu Rinpoche

- 3. Vajrayana
 - a. *Showing the Path of Liberation* by Thrangu Rinpoche
 - b. *Buddha Nature* by Thrangu Rinpoche
 - c. *The Four Dharmas of Gampopa* by Thrangu Rinpoche
 - d. *Chenrezig, Lord of Love* by Bokar Rinpoche
- C. Sangha: Lineage and the Transmission of Buddha's Teachings
 - 1. Buddhism in India
 - a. *The Development of Buddhism in India* by Thrangu Rinpoche
 - 2. How Buddhism Came to Tibet and the Four Schools of Tibetan Buddhism
 - a. *The Small Golden Key* by Thinley Norbu
 - 3. The History of the Karma Kagyu Lineage
 - a. *The Life of Marpa the Translator*, trans. by Nalanda Translation Committee
 - b. *The Life of Milarepa*, translated by Lobsang P. Lhalungpa
 - c. *The History of the 16 Karmapas of Tibet* by Karma Thinley

III. Special Categories

- A. Beginning Buddhist Practice
 - 1. *The Day of a Buddhist Practitioner* by Bokar Rinpoche
- B. Buddhist Art and Symbolism
 - 1. *Buddhist Symbols in Tibetan Culture* by Dagyal Rinpoche
 - 2. *Images of Enlightenment: Tibetan Art in Practice* by Jonathan Landaw & Andy Weber
- C. Buddhism and Family Life
 - 1. *Living in Compassion* by Bardor Tulku Rinpoche
- D. Death and Dying
 - 1. *Death and the Art of Dying* by Bokar Rinpoche
- E. General Information
 - 1. *Buddhism for Beginners* by Thubten Chodron
- F. Women and Buddhism
 - 1. *Women of Wisdom* by Tsultrim Allione
- G. Zen Buddhism (A Japanese Mahayana tradition)
 - 1. *Miracle of Mindfulness* by Thich Nhat Hahn
 - 2. *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki

