

LOJONG (7 Points of Mind Training)

Home Practices - 31 October onwards

Sitting Practice

30 - 45 minutes (or more) sitting practice every day when you can. Continue to do whatever practice you are currently doing and frame it within a Lojong context. At this stage of the course it means doing the *Buddha Within* practice (see below), then your normal practice and concluding with a dedication that expresses the motivation of bodhicitta. For the first month you can use the prayer of the 4 Limitless Contemplations (Slide 19).

Daily Life Practice

See if you can view your daily life ups and downs through the lens of Lojong. For the first month apply the key principles of Lojong (Slide 4) to your daily life. This means keeping your heart open in the face of difficulties and challenges and seeing them as a support for your practice, rather than a problem.

Keeping a Journal

Start a daily Lojong journal. You don't have to write much but see if you can write a few words down after your practice sessions. In particular, when you do the contemplation, meditation and daily life practices below write a few sentences in your journal afterwards. This helps to integrate your practice into your life experience. Once a week you can look back at what you've written and write a more in-depth entry. This will help you to gain an overview of your own process. *You do not have to hand in the journal; it is your own private record.*

Reading

Jamgon Kontrul (2005) *The Great Path of Awakening: The Classic Guide to Lojong, a Tibetan Buddhist Practice for Cultivating the Heart of Compassion*. Shambhala Publications

Chogyam Trungpa (1995) *Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving Kindness*. Shambhala Publications

Pema Chodron (2005) *Start Where You Are* plus Compassion (Lojong) cards. Element Books

Akong Tulku Rinpoche (1994) *Taming the Tiger*. Rider

We suggest that you buy the first 3 books. The Kontrul book is a classic guide to Lojong. The books by Trungpa and Pema Chodron are very good modern commentaries. The book by Akong Rinpoche is optional. It contains the Buddha Within practice.

PRACTICES

Buddhist Practice Approach

Study

First, study and understand the Lojong teachings at a cognitive level. This involves listening to teachings and reading books.

Contemplation

Second, contemplate what you have learnt and sense how it is relevant and meaningful to your life. Let the teachings land in your heart.

Meditation

Third, apply what you have learnt and contemplated to your life by creating new habits of awakening. This entails both sitting practice and daily life practice.

Contemplation

Find a stable and comfortable posture

Sit upright with dignity and presence

Take a few deeper breaths and let your mind to settle

Let the teachings of Bodhicitta land your heart

How does it feel to soften around tight self-absorption and open your heart to the richness, beauty and messiness of life all around you with the wish to be of service in any way you can?

Let the teachings of Lojong land your heart

How does it feel to use every circumstance in your life as the opportunity to cultivate the wise and compassionate heart of bodhicitta?

What is it like to see obstacles and difficulties as the fuel of awakening?

After contemplating in this way, spend a few minutes writing in your journal.

Buddha Within Meditation

Find a stable and comfortable posture

Sit upright with dignity and presence

Take a few deeper breaths and let your mind to settle

Come to rest in your breathing body

Resting in this way you might sense how your body is not solid but is a field of awareness

Rest in your body as a body of awareness

In your heart centre imagine a golden flower made of light that is fully open. It is the receptacle

Next, imagine a pathway of light going up the central channel and opening into a funnel at the crown of your head. It is the pathway

Imagine a sphere of rainbow-coloured lights just above the crown of your head. It expresses the clarity of wisdom and the warmth and responsiveness of compassion

This sphere radiates light invoking the blessing of the enlightened ones which stream into the sphere charging it with vitality and power. At this point you can recite the *Palden Tsaway...* prayer if you so choose (slide 18)

Imagine the sphere descending through the funnel and pathway of light until it comes to rest in the flower in your heart

Feel confident that the lamp of Buddha Nature in your heart has been lit

Now just rest in your body as a body of awareness in touch with the still, awake presence in your heart

Let thoughts and emotions come and go with the confidence that there is nothing to fear because you are aligned with that part of you that is fundamentally well and OK

Continue to do whatever meditation you choose and then end with the dedication prayer of the 4 Limitless Contemplations (Slide 20)

Audio recording of practice: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/47xn2pg52wqlmog6gv68y/Buddha-Within-1.m4a?rlkey=djgi4162ztnotas81rmu9klz&st=0y7k6aaa&dl=0>

*You can find a description of the practice in the book by Akong Rinpoche called *Taming the Tiger* (see reading list).*

A Note on Buddha Nature

It might be useful to say some more about Buddha Nature at this stage. It is part of absolute bodhicitta. It describes the part of ourselves that is always fundamentally whole, at peace and free no matter what difficulties, traumas and issues have weighed us down in our lives. Initially, we do not have direct experience of it and we tend not to live from this place of being whole and free. Instead, many people see themselves as limited and flawed. So, in the beginning it is useful to use imagination and ritual to touch this part of our being and start to build a relationship with it. In time it gradually matures and develops.

An image that is used in Buddhist texts is that of lamp. Buddha nature is a potential within that is likened to an unlit lamp. To start with we are sleeping Buddhas. The practice of bodhicitta is a way of gradually lighting the lamp of Buddha Nature. One way of doing this is by relating to others who have lit the lamp within themselves. People who have done this fully are described as being enlightened. They then have the capacity to light the lamps of others. If you think of this in a mundane way, when we are in the presence of someone who is truly loving and compassionate it can touch our capacity for compassion. We can feel touched. In a similar way, when we are with someone who has woken up to the truth of things we can feel touched by their presence. They touch our dormant capacity for awakening and something begins to stir. This is the basis of the Buddha Within Practice.

It can be helpful to start to align with our inner Buddha Nature, even symbolically in the beginning, because it becomes an anchor for the practice of Lojong. If we are aligned to a stable and whole part of ourselves it is easier to work with the practices of seeing obstacles and difficulties as being the fuel of awakening.

Therefore, we start with a symbolic process of connecting to our Buddha Nature (Buddha Within practice) and this gives us confidence to do the Lojong practices and awaken the compassionate heart of bodhicitta. As bodhicitta grows stronger through the practice of Lojong, our Buddha Nature becomes more and more apparent (like the sun appearing from behind the clouds) and this gives us more confidence with the practice of Lojong to widen the reach of our compassionate heart. In this way Buddha Nature and Bodhicitta reinforce one another (Slide 17)