

'The Journey and the Guide'
Teacher's Notes

Compiled by Maitreyabandhu September 2016

These notes aim to help you teach 'The Journey and the Guide' at Triratna Centres. I've tried in the book to give a practical overview of our system of spiritual training, starting with integration and running all the way up to Spiritual Death and Rebirth. I've wanted to show people right from the start what the Buddhist (and explicitly Triratna) approach is to the whole matter of human evolution and fulfillment. I've wanted it to be as practical and down-to-earth and up to date as possible without losing Dharmic content. The course is therefore an 8-week introduction to living the dharma life.

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Principles of teaching ‘The Journey and the Guide’

The best way of presenting this material is in a bookable 8-week course: I have written it with that assumption and with the assumption that the cost of the course includes the book. A course means that participants will get to know the course leaders over the 8 weeks, they will learn together (and become something of a sangha) and *vitaly* they will be able to report back each week about how they are getting on in putting the book into practice.

I give all team members a free copy of the book. In the booking confirmation I say that cost includes the book and if you already have it you could give your copy away (rather than trying to deduct the price of the book from the course). NB: I myself don't get any royalties from the book, royalties go straight to the LBC.

The course-book is designed with complete newcomers (though much of the content is suitable for all levels). I want to show people what the Triratna approach to the Dharma life is and help guide people in 8 weeks of trying it out. Given how much Buddhism/meditation/mindfulness is becoming known and given how many Buddhist groups and movements there are (not to mention the plethora of non-aligned teachers teaching online), it is important to be clearer about our particular approach to the Buddha's teaching.

Bhante wants us to be teaching the whole of the ‘five stages’ right from the very beginning. This is quite a challenge for teachers and many of us are in the early stages of discovering how best to do that. I hope the book/course will help.

Many who come to our Centres (especially young people) will already have looked up Buddhism and meditation on the various online platforms. You can watch YouTube videos on insight practice, non-duality, sunyata, no-self... you name it. All of this is probably changing the shape of Buddhism in our culture and needs to be an impetus to ‘up our game’ and teach a more vivid presentation of the dharma (that they cannot get online).

It is all the more important when we teach to embody our commitment to the Three Jewels to and to Bhante's presentation of the Dharma as much as possible. We need to be practicing all the stages deeply and consistently – especially as expressed in friendship, study, confession and ethics, meditation, insight and going on regular retreats. This is what you'll be recommending others to do.

The main challenge as a teacher is making the course your own. I've suggested the main dharma theme for each week below – I've put the theme in a box to make it clearer. You'll need to decide what approach to take and find your own way of teaching – not just repeating stuff in the book. The main thing I think is to be clear what the theme of each evening is and make sure that's got across.

To teach the course you yourself need to be convinced of the spiritual efficacy of Bhante's approach, otherwise you won't be able to embody it and communicate it. This also means doing the home practice yourself as the course goes on.

The Structure of the Book

The book is structured as an eight-week course book (the fact that it has a week 9 is a misprint, rather a large one!) What's called Week Nine in the book is in fact the chapter I recommend course participants to read after the course is finished.

I recommend people to read the Appendix: *The Five Stages of Triratna* as this applies what they've learnt to the symbolical and ritual signposts of the Triratna Journey – i.e. becoming a mitra, joining a study group, asking and becoming ordained, etc.

Each chapter is divided into a 'What' section (i.e. 'what is integration?') and a 'How' section: 'how to put integration into practice in ones life'. Each chapter concludes with a section of specific recommendations, entitled Practice.

Between each chapter is a 'semi chapter' using a poem as a way of exploring Spiritual Receptivity. My idea was to have a book that taught activity (integration, positive emotion, etc) followed by receptivity. I've used poems because we don't read poems in the same way we read prose – poetry slows you down, evokes a more suggestive atmosphere and to get anything from it you need to be receptive.

The book and course is comprised of two weeks on each stage of the path. I weave 'spiritual receptivity' between the chapters culminating in the final Chapter on Spontaneous Compassionate Activity, where I try to show how receptivity becomes 'spontaneous compassionate activity'.

*Between each pair of chapters is a check-list of that stage 'at a glance' – a résumé and reminder of what you've learnt. At the end of the book there's a résumé of the whole path called *The Five Stages at a Glance*.*

I introduce mindfulness especially in week one and two including such practices as the Three Stage Breathing Space and the Mindful walk.

*On week three I introduce a daily meditation session – with a suggestion for how to approach meditation each week. From week 5 and 6 onwards I introduce insightful ways of looking and *Buddhana Smirti*. I also suggest telling life stories, rejoicing in merits.*

*The book also introduces the life of the Buddha and I link the stages of the path to his life story. Also when we get to spiritual rebirth meditation the book teaches *Buddhanu Smirti**

*The book would function well as a follow on to *The Journey and the Guide* but I've also wanted it to be a stand-alone course book introducing our entire system of practice.*

The Structure of the Course

To lead this course you really need to make it your own. In the week-by-week guide below I've outlined the theme for each week in a box to show it is the most important thing to concentrate on. Then I've included the most important excerpts from the chapter to help you prepare for the evening (and for you to use or not use as you see fit).

Home Groups: If it is a large group I suggest 'home groups.' A 'home group' meets in the same grouping every week, led by one of your team members. It's a chance for team members to take more of a leading role. If the groups end up being too large (and therefore too time consuming) I split each of them into two for the discussion. We have one home group session per class.

I ask the team members to get group members to email them if they can't come to the class so the team member can tell the rest of the group. If the class-group is not large enough to break up into home groups, then the course leader should give out her/his email address and ask people to let them know if they can't come and that they (the course leader) will let the course participants know. When I've done this it has significantly improved retention on the course as it gives participants the sense that they make a difference.

I suggest course leaders don't lead a home group but visit a different one every week to listen-in to what people are saying – this means you'll get to know more people on the course and have a sense of how to pitch the teaching.

Even though this is a newcomer's course, I don't teach meditation or any of the structured practices. Each evening the course leader leads a 15/20 min meditation – approaches to which I've suggested below. I suggest that course participants come back and learn the 2 practices *after* the course has finished. I also mention I'll be introducing meditation on week 3 and my suggestion is that from then they follow the meditations in the book. If they already have a meditation practice, I suggest they incorporate the approach I take in the book into their daily meditation practice

Home Practice. The course mainly takes place outside the Centre – at home, at work, commuting, etc. A balance needs to be struck between encouraging participants to do the home practice and not making them feel bad about *not* doing it. The main thing to stress is that each week they'll be reporting in on how they got on with the home practice in their home group. Emphasize being actually able to *do* the home practice rather than having lots of great plans and bright ideas. ('Less is More')

Home practice doesn't suit everyone, most people find just coming to the course and reading the book means they are a bit more dharmically alive and more mindful.

Reading the book. I emphasize that this course includes a *home study aspect*, it's about views and attitudes and deepening one's understanding of the dharma, so I ask them to make sure they put time aside each week to read.

Poems. I suggest you read one of the poems after a 3-stage breathing space at the end of each evening to finish the night in a more inspirational, imaginative way. The poems (sorry to say this) need to be read well! So you'll need to practice them a bit (or get a good reader on your team to read them).

There is quite a squeeze in on the course so my suggestion is that the course starts at 7.15pm and finishes at 9.45pm (including a 20 min tea break).

Three aims for the Course

I have three core aims for course participants. Even if they don't do anything of the home practice I'd like them to do these three things:

- 1) Set up a regular daily meditation practice and use the course as a way of establishing that.
- 2) Go on a retreat or book on a retreat (it's on retreat that they will get a real taste of the dharma and a sense of what meditation can do).
- 3) Read the book (which means they'll get an overview of what Buddhism is, in theory and practice)

Suggested structure for the class

6.45pm. *I suggest participants come early to have a rest.* I suggest people lie down in the Shrine Room and have a nap (many come straight from work and will get on much better on the evening if they can have had a nap).

7.15pm. Brief intro to the evening and brief recap of the previous week

7.25pm. Led meditation, 15/20 mins. Leading it from the point of view of this evening's theme (i.e. integration, positive emotion etc)

7.55pm. Home group to check-in and see how they've got on with the home practice during the previous week (15 mins).

8.15pm. Tea Break (20 mins or so)

8.35/40pm. Dharma Presentation (20 mins) followed by setting 'home practice' for the coming week.

9.10pm. Brief check-in in (random) pairs to discuss how, specifically, they are going to put the 'home practice' into practice during the current week – what is realistic and doable?

9.25pm. Very short plenary to hear from people in the room about what they are going to do for the following week of home practice – thus sharing across the room

9.35pm. Short 'breathing space' followed by reading the poems (from the book) for that week.

9.45pm. Class ends.

Week by week guide to teaching ‘The Journey and the Guide’

Week 1: Introducing the Journey and the Guide

Preparation:

- If you have home groups you need to already have all the groups allocated. The main reason to do this is to make sure there are men in each group (in most of our Centres women vastly outnumber male participants).
- Copies of ‘The Journey and the Guide’ need to be ready on the shrine (make sure you have more than enough!)
- Make sure home group leaders (or course leaders) have slips of paper ready with their email address on to give to their group members.

NB: There’s quite a lot to get through on this first night, so keep meditation short and shorten the presentation if needs be.

Welcome to the course and introduction to the attitude you suggest they take to being on the course ie:

- *Come every week* – whether you feel like it or not. If you look for motivation before you do something, you reverse your motivation; mostly you only want to do something when you’re *actually doing it*. Decide now to commit yourself (we’ll be doing a ritual later on to emphasize that).
- *Come early* so you can lie down in the shrine room and have a nap – you probably need it and you’ll get more from the class if you do.
- *If are going to miss a class, email the class leader* or home group leader so we know and can let others know. And *do* come back the following week – don’t feel guilty for not having attended, just come back and start again.
- *Put aside some time each week to read the book* – there’s more to read about and learn on this course. Think of it as an 8-week crash course in learning and practicing the Dharma – which means learning how to unfold and realize your potential.
- *We’re going to be asking you to do some ‘home practice’* everyday and then each week you’ll be in a small group to check in about how that went.

Short meditation to settle people (15 min). Get them to notice the mind going off into *prapanca* and come back again and again to direct feelings of feeling and sensations.

Home groups – Read out the register (if needs be) allocating people into home groups. I allocate an area of the shrine room for each home group (e.g. at the four corners of the room) and tell people that’s where you’ll have your home group each week.

Get group leaders to introduce themselves and then get the group to introduce themselves briefly. They might say their name and 3 things: 1) Have they meditated before? 2) Why did they book on the course? 3) What are they hoping to get from the course?

If time a short plenary of people saying what they hope to get from the course – i.e. sharing a few views from around the room

Tea Break

Presentation: *Integration and the 'fit mind'*

We are used to the idea that we need to cultivate a fit body – eating well, exercising and so forth – but we're still to see the importance of cultivating a 'fit mind'. The theme this week is to help people see that to get anywhere in life – for life to go deeper, become more meaningful, more alive – they need a 'fit mind' and this means training in integration, which is primarily a matter of daily mindfulness practice: i.e. stepping out of *prapanca* and into the direct sensations/feelings of the body. Integration needs to be supported by simplifying ones life as much as possible as well as caring for the body. Integration is the first way in which we cultivate a fit mind.

Here are the keys elements from the chapter you might want to use:

The journey begins with cultivating a fit mind. We're used to the need for a fit body but we forget we need a fit mind: like a fit body it takes time, perseverance and daily application/training. If we act in a way to cultivate a fit mind we'll become calmer, more focussed, friendlier and more uplifted; our experience starts to feel smoother, there's inner harmony and continuity and integrity.

A genuinely fit mind includes this positive sense of dissatisfaction. This might come in the form of: a sense of personal unhappiness; political injustice; philosophical truth seeking; feeling for beauty, or an urgent sense of questing for a deeper life.

A fit mind begins with cultivating integration, inner integrity and continuity. We need to be collected rather than dissipated, unified rather than fragmented. What pulls us away from integration is the mind's automatic, associative chatter, our 'alienated thinking': it's not *thought* that's the problem; it's how aware or unaware our thinking is. *Prapanca* is associative, unaware and hankering – 'alienated thinking'. It's not our fault. We're not *doing it*. 'Integrated thinking' is founded on awareness, awareness of our habitual stories and interpretations and remembering that they are thoughts not facts.

Practice for this Week

Notice *prapanca*, because it's our *prapanca* that keeps up on the surface of ourselves: we need to cultivate an amused, benevolent attitude to the stuff-and-nonsense that goes through our head, so...noticing *prapanca* (mental proliferation), without inner criticism. Here's how:

1) *A fit body* – The word 'mind' can be misleading we don't realise how much our body affects our mental states. Do some more exercise this week, get to bed on time, don't look at screens before you go to bed (p. 25-26).

2) *Simplifying life* – Mindfulness is the first *inner* practice of integration, simplifying our life is the first *external* practice: we increase our disintegration in a delta of associative distractions and half-finished tasks. We need to cultivate mastery: doing things we've been putting off, etc.

'Mastery' is the foundation of positive emotion; it's never been so easy to fritter our life away. So this week:

- Reduce input
- Cultivate self-discipline
- Do the things you've been putting off

(See pages 30 – 31)

3) *The 3-stage breathing space*

Three times a day. Alternatively, the mindful meal, one meal each day (p.27- 29)

Brief period to discuss in ad-hoc pairs how you're going to put this week's home practice into practice: check it's realistic, practical, assessable (i.e. you can know if you've done it or not)

This evening finishes with a ritual. Explain that to really dedicate ourselves to the course we're going to do a simple ritual to collect the book. We will finish the evening by chanting the Shakyamuni mantra (because he is the 'Guide') and when we take the book from the shrine that's us dedicating the next 8 weeks to exploring this path of practice – tell them to hold the book during the mantra. You might tell them 'This doesn't mean you're going to end up a Buddhist, you're just trying it out for 8 weeks...it's a Buddhist test drive.'

Week 2: Supports for a 'Fit Mind'

Welcome and brief recap on what we learnt last week.

Say something about the fact that we can look at spiritual life either in terms of a journey or as a mandala. We can think in terms of 'stages' or 'aspects'. Thinking in terms of 'aspects' means trying to cultivate all the aspects at the same time.

Short meditation – this time using the breath as an anchor. Noticing your mind going off into *prapanca* – doing that with amused curiosity – then coming back into how that *prapanca* feels in the body and tuning into the breath again.

Home groups to discuss and share how you got on with the first week of practice.

If time, short plenary to share experience across the room.

Tea Break

Presentation: *Developing a fit mind: owning your life rather than blaming others*

The theme of this week is on the *moral aspects of integration*: i.e. taking full responsibility for your life, owning your life (instead of blaming others); developing a stronger sense of *agency* – living your own life not being a puppet of your computer or the media; the importance of being known by other people to know yourself and therefore become integrated; the importance of good conditions that support integration.

Here are the keys elements from the chapter you might want to use:

Integration is not a thought, an idea or a theory: it's a *sense*. The first characteristic of this 'sense' is an increasing experience of wholeness, unification and harmony.

The process of integration begins with acknowledging our *lack* of integration – we tend to identify only with part of ourselves or with an idea about ourselves: 'I'm this really easygoing guy, but the world keeps stressing me out!'

Integration is about taking *full responsibility for ourselves*: the more we accept that responsibility, the more we own our life: it is the opposite of blame.

Without integration we'll be driven by instinct and caprice. The modern market preys on our lack of inner momentum. Integration = having a stronger sense of *agency* in the world.

Their needs to be a central focus: Integration can only take place if we have something to integrate *around*. Without this central focus there's a feeling of discontinuity. We need a single organising principle around which to integrate – not 'single' in the narrow sense more like a unifying current. To become fully integrated, we need some kind of self-transcending meaning at the centre of our lives.

Integration is linked to our moral sense. It means fully grasping that what we *do has an effect* – an effect on our own unfolding consciousness, an effect on other people's unfolding consciousness.

We need:

- *Good conditions*: cultivating a life-context that supports integration
- *Learn from our experience*: We need to fathom what kind of creature we are. We have a psychic shape just as we have a physical shape
- *Be together*: If we want to become integrated, we need to deepen our communication. To know ourselves, we need to be known by others.
- *Because we are disintegrated we are bound to have blind spots*: we need trusted friends who can help us see ourselves. It's often in our relationship with others, including our clashes with them, that we learn most about ourselves.

Practice for the Week

Working with *prapanca* means gradually weaning ourselves off the things that exacerbate it. We'll need to simplify our life and limit over-stimulation, image-glut, and information overload. We work to cultivate fruitful and sustaining interests.

So this week:

- *The mindful walk*: take up a daily mindful walk, perhaps to your bus/train stop. A walk you do each day, no longer than 20 mins (p.59)
- Breathing space: 3 x Breathing Spaces per day (p.61)
- *Life stories*. If you can see if you can gather a small group of people together to tell each other your life story (or make a date to do that). You'll need to do this outside the context of the course. Or share 3 turning points in your life. (p.63 -64)

If time a brief plenary of what people are going to do to cultivate integration during the week, so as to share with the whole class. Recap the things you're asking them to do (if time)

Lead a 3-stage Breathing Space, then read *The Niagara River* (it's quite hard to read, so you'll need to prepare it!)

Week 3: Positive Emotion – the Stage of Action

Welcome and brief recap on what we learnt last week.

Short meditation: exploring *vedana*. Get people to feel the sensations of the body in terms of *vedana* (you might introduce the term). Guide people in exploring their body in terms of pleasant/ unpleasant/ neutral feelings and see if they can just feel that without reacting. Working with receptive awareness, exploring what *vedana* is and how to feel it directly without narratives or analysis

Home groups to discuss and share how you got on with the second week of practice

Tea Break

Presentation: *What is 'Positive Emotion'?*

Mindfulness is not enough; we need to act in order to flourish our life and the lives of those around us. This stage of the path is the stage of *action* – it is primarily about distinguishing skillful from the unskillful (and acting on that basis); it is cultivating a deeper understanding of the meaning and consequences of our actions; seeing that if we want to live well we need to cultivate gratitude and be generous. This is largely a matter of refining our moral-cum-aesthetic sensibility – it's not a question of learning a set of 'Buddhist' rules. This is also the first week we introduce a *daily meditation practice* – setting that up needs to be a key goal of the course.

Here are the keys elements from the chapter you might want to use:

Positive emotion is the ripening of integration: it is the stage of action. The more integrated we are the more we can act wholeheartedly. We can't *decide* to be wholehearted because so much of our heart is not accessible to reason, so the first task is to become integrated.

'Positive' & 'Emotion' are not a very good terms – problems with 'Positive' and 'emotion' [I use it because Bhante uses it and to help ensure commonality of teaching. I also use others terms such as 'emotional strength', kusala karma, etc] 'Positive' can sound wishy-washy and 'emotion' is too... emotional. (How 'emotionally' we feel our emotions is largely a matter of temperament) Genuinely 'positive emotion' means leaving a lower state of mind behind in order to ascend to a higher one.

Kusala Karma. *Kusala* actions are intelligent, fruitful and appropriate responses to any given situation. They're helpful in the sense of *helping us gain Enlightenment*; and they're intelligent in the sense of being adept – we see what's best for all concerned and we work intelligently to bring that about.

So this stage of the journey is about distinguishing between the skilful and unskilful. This is not as straightforward as it sounds. It is primarily a question of refining our sensibility: developing this moral-cum-aesthetic sense.

This stage of the journey means: cultivating positive volitions, and abandoning negative volitions. Volitions are often mixed, so it is also about gradually, intelligently purifying our volitions.

Elements of positive emotion:

- *Emotional*: we feel open, generous, more fulfilled and more outward looking. We're more aware of and interested in others. We're more easily satisfied and quicker to help; we're emotionally richer and bounce back from difficulties more easily.
- *Energetic*: we feel more alive and physically vital. We're more on the ball, more focused and less easily distracted. We're less resistant to life's duties and business.
- *Cognitive*: we feel clear-headed and more acute. Our thinking is more flexible, insightful and alert. We're on the look out for deeper understandings,

And we need a sense of humour!

A positive mood evokes an entirely different way of thinking from a negative mood.

Practice 1) Do something to cultivate integration:

- The mindful walk: 'the taste of life' – tuning into vedana (p. 95 -96)
- Breathing space – 3 times a day (p.96)
- Coping breathing space – when needed (p.96)

2) Do something to cultivate positive emotion:

- *Gratitude*. For the next two weeks (i.e. both weeks of positive emotion), before you go to bed, write down five things you feel grateful for from that day. (p.97 - 99)
- *Generosity*. See if you can do one generous thing every day for the next two weeks that you would not normally do. (p.97 -99)

Meditation: the first training

- This is the week that we start to introduce meditation (p. 99 – 101)

If time a brief plenary of what people are going to do to cultivate positive emotion during the week, so as to share with the whole class. Very brief recap on what you're asking them to do.

Finally: lead a 3-stage Breathing Space, then read *Snowdrop*

Week Four: Positive Emotion, Other People

Welcome and brief recap on what we learnt last week.

Short meditation in terms of feeling the *vedana*. Talk in terms of cultivating receptive awareness of the sensations (*vedana*) in the chest and belly. Then bring a friend to mind and seeing how that affects those sensations...be honest with yourself and feel what you actually feel (not what you'd like to feel or *think* you should feel). Bring the friend to mind again (image, or their name, etc) and see if you can nudge into metta from receptive awareness.

Home groups to discuss and share how you got on with the third week of practice

Tea Break

Presentation: *Positive Emotion, Community and Friendship*

It is tempting to teach the path in an overly personal (even individualistic) way; this week emphasizes that positive emotion is as much to do with others as ourselves. It's other people and our interaction with them that brings out the issues we need to work with. We need the support, friendship and sheer provocation of other people to genuinely make progress. So this week emphasizes the need to be involved with a community (such as ours) as well the vital part friendship plays in human growth and fulfillment.

Here are the keys elements from the chapter you might want to use:

The aim of the journey is to cultivate a fit mind so that our experience arises in a richer, fuller, more refined way.

Delight: The more we want pleasure the less we experience it: our mind stops attending to the pleasure we're *having* and fixates on the pleasures we *want*. So an essential aspect of positive emotion is cultivating delight. We're looking for blameless absorption. We need to guard our sources of inspiration.

Community: How we behave can't be separated from the world we 'behave' in. If we want to change our mind, we need to change the company we keep. It's often through the company we keep that we consider changing our mind in the first place. So if we're serious about the journey, we need to spend as much time as possible with those we trust to be unselfish, emotionally positive, clear-headed and of good will. Participating in a community of fellow practitioners (i.e. going to a Buddhist Centre) tells you that you are someone who is interested in growing and developing. It tells you the journey is important to you, and *it reinforces that importance*.

Practice for this Week

Positive emotion: carry on with your nightly gratitude list and daily generous act

Positive emotion: Friendship: Put aside some time this week to spend with a friend and see if you can communicate more fully with them – e.g. take more interest in them, listen to them, be more honest, etc. The way to make a friend is to be a friend. (p. 126 – 128)

The most important ingredients are:

- *Time*: The most important ingredient in friendship is time, spend as much time together as possible.
- Someone who shares your ideals.
- Someone of the same gender.

So this week put aside more to time either make friends, or deepen your existing friendships. You might make a mandala of friendship

Integration: Carry on with the mindful walk, breathing space and coping breathing space (p. 128-9)

Meditation: The second training: *vedana* (p.129 – 132)

If time a brief plenary of what people are going to do to cultivate positive emotion during the week, so as to share with the whole class

Finally: lead a 3-stage Breathing Space, then read *The More Loving One*.

Week 5: Spiritual Death – the Laws/Regularities of Life

Welcome and brief recap on what we learnt last week.

Short meditation noticing any holding in the body and mind and taking up the view that *Dukkha* is caused by craving which manifests as holding on, grasping, tightening onto thought, feelings, body sensations, etc. Easiest way to do this is to feel constriction and grasping in the body and see if you can soften that and let it go (it'll be the physical manifestation of some craving or aversion in your experience). See if you can feel any craving or aversion – especially reflected in the body – and let go of it.

Home groups to discuss and share how you got on with the second week of practice

Tea Break

Presentation: *Introducing Spiritual Death and the Niyamas*

NB: There is a lot more Dharma to be taught in the next weeks. You'll see how much of it you want to put across and spread it out across the following 4 weeks. The important thing is that this 2nd part of the course has strong dharmic content.

The theme this week is the relationship between the laws of Karma and Dharma. This is really what 'the journey' comes down to – working with the structure/pattern of reality, the regularities that shape human experience, making an effort to act skillfully, thereby changing our future and opening to the stream of the dharma coming from outside self-clinging. This is really the theme of the last three weeks. In cultivating integration and positive emotion you are working skillfully with the law of Karma and thereby changing the nature of your mind. Spiritual death means letting go of all self-clinging, egotism, selfishness, so that a new consciousness which goes beyond us but is not separate from us can arise.

Here are the key elements from the chapter you might want to use:

Life, as we experience it, is patterned by certain natural regularities or laws (*niyamas* in Pali). They can be observed directly. They're not ways of thinking and they're not 'things'. We can talk of three laws governing what has come to be known as the sciences:

Utu-niyama (inorganic laws) – all those ways in which physical inorganic matter is conditioned: governs such things as thermodynamics, electricity. It's the law of the mineral kingdom.

Bija-niyama (organic laws) – all those organic laws that govern circulation of lymph or how plants convert sunlight into biomass through photosynthesis, etc. Covered by botany, biology, etc.

Mano-niyama (laws of instinct and perception) – the workings of perception, fight-or-flight reactions, and instinct covered by zoology and behavioral science. Integration, for instance, is partly concerned with taking ownership of our *uttu-bija-mano-niyama* inheritance. We arrive in life with all sorts of givens – genetics etc. Part of integration therefore means uncovering our inherent structuring.

But there are two further laws that govern consciousness and its relationship with the world:

Karma-niyama. Comes into play with reflexive self-consciousness. *Karma-niyama* processes describe the relationship between a self-conscious subject (you and me) and our experience. It governs the relationship between actions of body, speech and mind and the effects of those actions. Like any law, e.g. gravity, this law is *natural*. *Karma-niyama* processes describe the regularities in reality that enables human and spiritual life to flourish: it is the law of positive growth. This is exemplified positive emotion – making intelligent use of the way in which the universe is structured

Dharma-niyama processes come into play when we begin to leave our attachment to ourselves behind. As we begin to let go of ‘me’, a new kind of conditioning arises that we can directly feel – ‘There’s the work we can do and must do then there’s what *comes through*’. When we feel it – *if* we feel it – it’s often the faintest pull of a current: a sense of something that can’t be accounted for. *Examples*: we can feel it in creative life; when we feel taken over by a ‘will’ (very inverted commas) beyond our own; in friendship; in a powerful sense of common vision and shared task that goes beyond the individual egos of those involved.

Because *Dharma-niyama* processes are not *willed*, they can never be willed back. We need some kind of faith that life has within it, *naturally* within it, something *more* than life, something *beyond* life.

Spiritual death isn’t death. There is no self in the first place. This is important to remember otherwise we might assume that the journey culminates in a kind of loss. What’s essentially happening in spiritual death is we’re letting go of a limited (and limiting) view of ourselves so that we can experience the unlimited. Spiritual death saves us from turning the journey into a never-ending self-improvement exercise.

Spiritual death is death. Even though that ‘something’ is a construction, a view, it’s nevertheless a view we’re extremely attached to.

If *dharma-niyama* processes can’t be willed what *can* we do? We can create conditions in which spiritual death is more likely to arise. Without some hint of *dharma-niyama* processes we will settle for refined selfishness. Those who are dedicated to being in touch with it are characterized by 1) there being something radical about them, 2) ongoing renunciation, 3) remarkable energy and psychic aliveness and 4) altruism and love.

‘Real spiritual death’ means being carried beyond the limitations of self-attachment
‘Effective spiritual death’ is our wholehearted commitment to real spiritual death.
‘Provisional spiritual death’ is the fundamental working ground i.e. being less selfish.

Commitment marks the decisive point in life. Until we commit ourselves we’re never really serious – we can always change our mind. When we commit ourselves to the journey everything gets *amplified*. All this gives our life new meaning and deeper purpose, but it also disrupts it.

Practice for the Week

Being less selfish: do something unselfish – in body, speak or mind, everyday: quite consciously put others first, give, listen, try and think how specifically you could be less selfish in your life.

Mindful walk
Breathing space

Meditation: Commitment – this week see if you can commit yourself to a daily meditation – for the rest of the course at least:

- Find a regular time to meditate
- create a special place in your room
- attend weekly meditation classes
- go on regular retreats
- cultivate friends (that you can talk to about meditation and the journey)

If time a brief plenary of what people are going to do to cultivate spiritual death (in the provisional sense) during the week, so as to share with the whole class

Finally: lead a 3-stage Breathing Space, then read *The Ideal*.

Week 6: The Views that Create Self

Brief recap – i.e. we cultivate integration in order to take full ownership of our life. On the basis of an integrated state of mind we can make wise choices. Positive emotion means acting more skillfully so that our sense of ourselves arises in a more malleable, enriched and deepened way – but our self-attachment will keep reasserting itself. Usually we put plenty of cotton wool between our day-to-day sense of ourselves and the raw egotism that drives us.

Lead a short meditation period of gladdening the heart – i.e. get people to tune-in to the *vedana* around the heart centre and then suggest they bring their friends to mind, keep noticing how bringing them to mind effects the heart centre.

Home groups to discuss and share how you got on with the second week of practice

Tea Break

Presentation: *Spiritual Death – views that create self*

Our views (by which I mean pre-conscious assumptions, unaware and habitual theories about ourselves and about our world, prejudices, etc) hold self together. We live out the stories we tell about ourselves and others, and these stories 'edit' experience, making whatever confirms to our view/ story to show up and feel true and whatever *doesn't* to be minimized or explained away. How we behave depends on our views. We tend to think we have *experience* with views, theories, opinions and beliefs floating about in it (like fish in a fish tank). Actually the view we have shapes and even creates the experiences we have. We live in a world that conforms to the views we have about it. Views are the fish tank in which experiences appear. So Spiritual Death is about challenging our views and learning views that are more helpful and true

Here are the keys elements from the chapter you might want to use:

Confession, apology and reparation: We can't *do* spiritual death. Self can't *do* non-self. What we *can* do is confess what holds us back. Once we've confessed, we need to do whatever we can to make amends – i.e. we can apologize and ask for forgiveness.

Deepening our relationships: sangha. Our own efforts will not be enough. We need to spend as much time as possible with those who have confidence that if they act unselfishly, a new kind of law of causality will come into being. We need other people who help reinforce our desire to stay on the journey. Interacting with other members of the sangha is one of the most powerful tools for transcending ourselves. We're looking for a particular kind of intensity of engagement, where we make an effort to engage with others who are also making an effort to engage with us.

Practice for the Week

Doing nothing – see if you can spend more time this week doing nothing, letting self dying

Study – see if you can put more time into reading/ studying the book

Book a retreat – A retreat is the opportunity to put yourself in conditions that help life flourish. Going on retreat requires effort to go beyond the comfort zone. Often, the more karmically skillful action requires more exertion on our part. In time you might think about going on a solitary retreat. Solitude comes as a shock. The decision to be alone is a kind of death. In this death of solitude, you have to face yourself.

See if you can practice something from the five stages every day. Self-dying' needs to be a daily feature of our life if we are to travel on the journey towards Enlightenment: it is the decision to step away from worldly pursuits into the stream of the dharma.

Meditation: Five reflections for everyone (P.206). Ask them to read this section and see if they can do the practice three times before the next class.

If time a brief plenary of what people are going to do to cultivate spiritual death (in the provisional sense) during the week, so as to share with the whole class.

Finally: lead a 3-stage Breathing Space, then read *For Once then, Something*.

Week 7: Spiritual Rebirth and Imagination

Welcome and brief recap on what we learnt last week.

Short meditation in terms of the imagination. You might lead a short metta practice, asking people to use their imagination to cultivate loving kindly, or you might ask people to find ways of using their imagination to help them connect with their breath.

Home groups to discuss and share how you got on with the second week of practice

Tea Break

Presentation: *The arising of a new consciousness from outside egotism*

The twin themes of this evening are 1) what is spiritual rebirth? and 2) the importance of imagination. Once we've seen through the delusion of self-attachment a continuous stream of self-less mental states arise. We see things *as they really are* without distortion of attachment and this expresses itself naturally as compassion for all beings. Dharma life means setting up the conditions for *dharma-niyama* processes to spontaneously unfold and flow more freely. We set up these conditions by cultivating integration, positive emotion, spiritual receptivity and spiritual death. And we cultivate the imagination. Imagination takes us a little beyond ourselves. It takes us beyond our present way of seeing into a deeper, more integral sense of how things are. Imagination is the synthesis of reason, emotion and the senses.

Here are the keys elements from the chapter you might want to use:

As we progress on the journey we increasingly feel the limitations of self. We start to see our ingrained habits more clearly, with less self-delusion, self-justification and blame.

The most important thing we're trying to cultivate on the path is *wholeness* – where thinking and feeling flow together in a new unity and all our energies are aroused in a single act of perception. This new faculty of wholeness – intelligent but not heady, richly felt but not merely emotional – takes us beyond the threshold of 'being-me'.

Spiritual rebirth arises spontaneously from spiritual death. Once we've seen through the delusion of self-attachment a continuous stream of self-less mental states arise. We see 'things as they are' without distortion or attachment. Our mind, no longer circling back to 'me', naturally reaches out to others in empathy. We enter a magical realm where the usual ways of thinking and perceiving no longer obtains. Even concepts of space and time are transcended. Language fails. The boundary we usually impose between ourselves and the world dissolves and we're freed, momentarily at least, from the unquenchable thirst to be someone, do something, get somewhere.

Dharma life means setting up the conditions, internally and externally, for *dharma-niyama* processes to flow more and more freely:

- *internally* by cultivating integration and positive emotion: taking full responsibility for our lives and making an effort to live more ethically.
- *externally* by helping create conditions that support a truly human life. Eventually, a new order of conditionality arises within us because 'self' has got out of the way.

This new order of conditionality can only arise to the degree to which we have spiritually died.

Self cannot will what is beyond self. Spiritual rebirth can't be taught – we have to catch it from people who are more in touch with it. Our belief in ourselves as a fixed, really existing thing in a world of fixed really existing things, is wrong – we're taking experience literally.

Varieties of spiritual rebirth

- *Experiences of 'heightened significance'* – The form is still there, if anything more vividly so, and yet at the same time some mystery pervades it, some open-endedness.
- *Experiences of beauty* unification of pleasure and meaning. Time seems suspended, and, as we step out of our endless desiring, we feel finally satisfied, at least for a while.
- *Experiences of meaning* – The problem with the language of 'meaning' is we can assume 'meaning' to be essentially conceptual. It is often felt as a kind of atmosphere, particularly a shared atmosphere.
- *Experiences of un-selfish love*

Spiritual rebirth, by definition, is indefinable: we need to be careful not to try to pin it down.

What we actually need is confidence in *karma-* and *Dharma-niyama* processes

Dharma-niyama processes are always pulling on us. The trouble is, lots of other things are pulling on us as well. The journey is therefore about aligning ourselves more and more with the pull of reality. Without some glimpse of spiritual rebirth we'll drift back to the *laissez-faire* nihilism that surrounds us. The primary way in which we 'cultivate' spiritual rebirth is by discovering, enriching and uplifting our imagination.

Imagination: What it isn't

- *Not just about Art* And not about 'fancy'. Fancy is about rearranging the usual contents of the experience in new, arbitrary combinations without changing their fundamental character. Fantasy is fundamentally to do with wish fulfillment. It seduces us away from the real issues of life by peddling make-believe solutions. We can indulge in spiritual fantasy as well.
- *Not necessarily about images* Imagination is a faculty we all share, but we may not be aware of it and it may not function very strongly in our lives. We need to recognize, educate and cultivate our imagination so that it becomes a more and more central to our way of being in the world

What it is

The way we can tell if imagination has entered into our life is whether we have been taken a little beyond ourselves. Imagination always goes beyond our present way of seeing into a deeper, more integral sense of how things are. Imagination is the synthesis of reason, emotion and the senses. Genuinely imaginative experience has all the rigour of intellectual thought.

Imagination is characterized by:

- *Aliveness:* something *unwilled* enters our experience, something uncanny. It – art work, visualized figure in meditation is felt to be alive. This ‘aliveness’ in turn transforms us.
- *Discovery:* Imagination is characterized by a sense of discovering some deeper truth. What is discovered through imagination is truer, richer and more complete.
- *Unity:* Imagination unifies the contents of experience by discovering something within them, some underlying meaning and significance, inaccessible to ordinary consciousness.
- *Playfulness:* Imagination often comes in sideways, when we least expect it.
- *Ascent:* Imagination has the capacity to ascend further and further beyond self-attachment

Practice for the Week

- *Spend some time this week deepening your engagement with the arts.* Make time for those aspects of life that have within them a touch of the imagination: read a good novel for an evening, go to a gallery, read some poems everyday
- *Spend more time in the natural world (as the basis of imagination)* The deeper experience goes, the more unwarranted and auspicious it feels. Deeper experiences bring us closer to nature, because ‘deeper’ always means ‘less self’. Less self equals more world
- Carry on with the Mindful Walk
- Daily meditation – practicing *Buddhanu Smirti* x 3 times in the coming week.

(On this evening especially start getting them to think about how they are going to carry on the journey i.e. what weekly class will you go to; booking on a retreat; taking the next step: joining a class team, for instance)

If time a brief plenary of what people are going to do to cultivate spiritual death (in the provisional sense) during the week, so as to share with the whole class

Finally: lead a 3-stage Breathing Space, then read *The Thought Fox*.

Week 8: Shraddha – Imagination Looking Up

Preparation for the class: have postcards ready on the shrine. The idea is that at the end of the course the participants write a postcard to themselves about how they intend to continue 'the journey' which the course leaders and centre send them in a month or two's time.

Also we finish with *Transference of Merits*.

Welcome and brief recap on what we learnt last week.

Lead a short meditation. My suggestion is that you lead a short session of *Buddhana-smirti* (P.271)

Home groups to discuss and share how you got on with the second week of practice

Tea Break

Presentation: *Shraddha and living in mystery*

As soon as we talk about spiritual death and rebirth, we enter into mysteries. Buddhist teachings are trying to wake us up to something beyond our day-to-day mind – beyond our fixed categories of time, space and causality. One of the limitations of the word 'imagination' is that it is too secular. Perhaps it would be better to use *Shraddha*. *Shraddha* is our imaginative faculty resonating with the goal of human life. It is imagination looking up (just as compassion is imagination looking 'down') It is based on 3 things:

- *Intuition* *Shraddha* arises firstly as an intuition
- *Reason* Having intuited a sense of 'rightness', we set about applying our reason
- *Experience* Having seen it's true and self-consistent on the basis of intuition, you put it confidently into practice and confirm it directly in your experience.

Often enough *Shraddha* is just our background sense of motivation: the fact that we bother to get up early to meditate, or go on retreat. *Shraddha* expresses itself in action: it's not a sentimental emotion. As *shraddha* grows, we start to feel more confident in a reality that goes beyond self-clinging. Ultimately *shraddha* becomes a kind of knowing.

Here are the keys elements from the chapter you might want to use:

As soon as we talk about spiritual death and rebirth, we enter into mysteries. Buddhist teachings are trying to wake us up to something quite beyond our day-to-day mind – beyond our fixed categories of time, space and causality. The Buddha's approach was essentially pragmatic. He helped people to develop a fit mind so that they could see reality for themselves.

But the Buddha lived in an intensely animistic world imbued with reverence and devotion, and this meant that many of those who met him were already receptive to the mysteries beyond thought.

If we don't identify imagination as a faculty, we won't be able to use it.

We can trust our imagination to the degree that we have liberated ourselves from self-clinging and pride.

If we're dharmically *immature*, we're likely to appropriate the imagination, to turn it into yet another self-aggrandizing story or mix it up with fantasy and histrionics. So we need as a basis:

- *Integration* – For imagination to be healthy it needs to be grounded in ordinary physical sensations.
- *Positive emotion* – We need positive emotion to ensure that our imagination arises from a healthy human state of mind, not an unhealthy and distorted one.
- *Spiritual receptivity* – We need spiritual receptivity to make sure we're open to the *unwilled*, to the stream of the dharma, pulling us beyond self-conceit. Receptivity includes being receptive to dharma teachers and friends.
- *Spiritual death* – We need spiritual death so that our imagination is the expression of a committed dharma life and not the result of some vanity-project or pseudo-spiritual fantasy. This means regularly studying the dharma: growing our imagination in the healthy soil of the Buddha's transcending vision.

Imagination can lead us into such profound experiences that we struggle to make sense of them in everyday terms.

One of the limitations of the word 'imagination' is that it is too secular perhaps better to use the word *Shraddha*. *Shraddha* is our imaginative faculty resonating with the goal of human life. It is based on 3 things:

- *Intuition Shraddha* arises firstly as an intuition
- *Reason* Having intuited a sense of 'rightness', we set about applying our reason
- *Experience* Having seen it's true and self-consistent on the basis of intuition, you put it confidently into practice and confirm it directly in your experience.

Often enough *Shraddha* just our background sense of motivation: the fact that we bother to get up early to meditate, or go on retreat. *Shraddha* expresses itself in action: it's not a sentimental emotion.

How we think about our experience *changes* our experience. If we conceptualize badly our conceptualizations take us further and further away from reality. If, on the other hand, we mistake *dharma-niyama* processes for God, we get stuck in reified terminology. We need to use concepts to get us closer to direct experience rather than spiraling off into abstraction and speculation.

We need three things:

- *Dharma practice* – To make progress, the journey needs to become the quest of our life. We need a daily meditation practice, regular retreats, dharma friendship, ethical life...
- *Dharma lifestyle* – We'll need a lifestyle that supports our practice. e.g. regularly going on retreat, coming to the centre, not having horribly stressful or unethical work, etc
- *Dharma service* In order to make progress, we need to serve something bigger than ourselves. We're not serving an ideology, even a Buddhist ideology; we're serving

life's highest potential. We can only serve the dharma to the degree we've understood it.

Practice from now onwards:

- *Dharma practice* – What areas of your practice are weak, and how could you strengthen them?
- *Dharma lifestyle* – Are you putting time into friendships with members of your own gender? Are you actively participating in the sangha? Have you booked a retreat?
- *Dharma service* How could you serve a vision that is bigger than you?

What you really need from now on if you are to make progress on the journey

- An effective daily meditation – on the basis of living an ethical life
- Regular participation in the sangha – including dharma study
- Regular retreats

If time a brief plenary of what people are going to do to cultivate spiritual rebirth (in the provisional sense) during the week, so as to share with the whole class.

Finally: lead a 3-stage Breathing Space, then read the poem *Ithaca* followed by a short ritual:

Recite the Transference of Merits from the puja in call and response. Followed by the Shakyamuni mantra. During the mantra participants come and collect a postcard from the shrine and before they go home write a postcard to themselves and give it to the leaders to post at some later date (a month or two later).

The Journey *at a glance*

A reminder: cultivating all five aspect of the journey

All you need to do is keep cultivating a fit mind and with that fit mind open yourself to how things really are. See if you can do at least one thing from each stage every day. You could:

Integration

- Practice the *Mindfulness of Breathing*.
- Practice the mindful walk/breathing space.
- Cultivate mindfulness of the body and it's movements.
- Tell your life story.
- Cultivate self-knowledge.
- Reflect on how you function effectively in the world – what conditions do to you need in order to flourish?
- Ask your friends for feedback.
- Make sure you do regular exercise, get enough sleep and eat healthily.
- Relax.
- Get to know your particular unhelpful coping mechanisms and foibles.

Positive emotion

- Practice the *Metta Bhavana*.
- Cultivate mindfulness of *vedana* (feeling-sensation).
- Be generous – give your time, energy, help, enthusiasm, money.
- Cultivate gratitude.
- Be courageous.
- Be honest, kind, truthful, and dependable.
- Cut back on intoxicants.
- Make friends and stay friends.
- Spend as much time as possible contributing to the sangha.
- Give to the situation around you, help out and be willing to inconvenience yourself.
- Go on retreat.

Spiritual death

- Practice *The Five Reflections for Everyone*.
- Challenge your views – the unhelpful views that hold ‘self’ together.
- Act more and more unselfishly.
- Apologize.
- Forgive.
- Admit your shortcomings.
- Practice renunciation.
- Simplify your life.
- Confess negative actions of body, speech and mind.
- Book a solitary retreat.

Spiritual rebirth

- Practice *The Recollection of the Buddha*.
- Cultivate mindfulness of reality.
- Discover, enrich and uplift your imagination.
- Cultivate *shraddha* – perform a puja, chant mantras.
- Spend time intensely communicating with friends in the dharma.
- Read/study the dharma – or listen to a talk.
- Make time to improve your cultural diet.
- Spend time with someone you look up to.
- Work intensively with others on a dharma project.

Spiritual receptivity

- Practice *Just Sitting*.
- Sit in a chair for half an hour and do nothing.
- Spend time in nature (without musical accompaniment).
- Turn off your phone/computer/newsfeed.
- Sit and read a good book for a whole evening.
- Reduce input.
- Learn something, open yourself to value.
- Ask for guidance and feedback from those you look up to.
- Go to a Buddhist class.
- Open up to the mystery of *dharma-niyama* processes.