

Followup to the Class of Nov 5

Thank you to everyone who came to the talk this past Tuesday—we covered a lot of material because many of you, it was evident to me, were familiar through your ongoing paths with many of the notions we discussed.

I do feel some followup is needed since, in some cases, it was not possible to give a complete response to some comments.

Topic 1 Why Are We Doing This?

This question was raised concerning the perception exercise (stop and be---feel the confirmation of your existence/allow the perceptual object to recognize you/--dance with perceiving and perceived/flirt). It might be helpful to give a more expansive response about the Shambhala understanding on deepening our experience; this understanding is likely true for many spiritual paths

Most of us are on a spiritual path because something is discordant, not quite harmonious, disquieting, having a vague sense of disconnection, something needs healing, haunting sense of needing something more. In fact, this is what the word dukha (from the Buddhist tradition) actually means; commonly translated as suffering, this is what the word means in a Buddhist context. Because we live in culture that feeds this disharmony, we need disciplines—techniques—to work methodically with dukha. Hoping for the best is not skillful. Skill is called upaya in the Buddhist tradition.

There are generally four upayas to address dukha and these upayas need to work in tandem and simultaneously.

1. Meditation

By this, we mean nowness and presentness techniques. It is not a means in itself; it is meant to train ourselves in preventing our consciousness from being flung from one random state to another in a reactive response to events in our lives. Meditating a few times a week and hoping for the best is an anemic approach. We need to remember the nowness experience and re-enter it in our daily lives, when appropriate (only a few are safe enough to do while driving!). (There are hundreds of nowness upayas—from opening the senses to visualizations/mantras/gestures.) This is a practice from the heart.

2. Studying, listening, applying

We kinda know how to do this already. Kinda. In the Shambhala and Buddhist traditions, this is called becoming familiar with the view. View in the Buddhist tradition is called prajna.

Spiritual practice is an uphill endeavor. The downsloping of the hill is the cultural and habitual and deeply subconscious tendencies (referred to as karma in the Buddhist tradition) that hinder profound social and personal change. The upsloping of the hill is our intention for harmony and healing, both self, other and society and, perhaps, our species. A key part of this upaya is memorization of text we have read, phrases we have heard, and heart-rending memories that

have opened our being. We are transforming our random discursiveness of me into the focused discursiveness of prajna. That is the first step, though eventually, we do aim to liberate discursiveness entirely. (Prajna can be non-verbal.) This is a practice from the head; it is primarily intellectual although intuitive wisdom is also developed.

3. Community

We need others of similar orientation with whom we can share our understanding and reduce the likelihood of twisting teachings to our convenience. Community (referred to as sangha in the Buddhist tradition) can be 1) a few people we feel safe in sharing our weird ideas and experiences; 2) an other as a focus and example of otherness-directed activity, usually a master in the tradition we follow (referred to as elder, spiritual friend, guru in the Buddhist tradition and as sakyong in the Shambhala tradition); 3) a sense of companionship with awakened energy as the raw power of the elements and unseen presences (in the Shambhala tradition, referred to as drala); and 4) a sense of help from our own innermost resources (e.g., a dream that rivets us in its clarity and message. This is a practice from the heart and based on love and yearning.

4. In-life Exercises

These are exercises to forcefully interrupt our daily journey of being flung from one state of mind to another. There must be thousands of these in the course of the human journey to awakening from thousands of spiritual traditions, both the hidden and the public. We get jaded easily and so they are used only to the extent they refreshen our experience of being human.

Basically, these types of exercises are about changing how we perceive. If we do not change how we perceive, it is unlikely we change how we behave, which is how our lives have become so discordant in the first place.

Meditation and study are slow upayas that work on the underpinning of our lives. We also, need sudden, deliberate practices to gently destabilize our normal way of living our lives. It brings us familiarity with being stabilized and that is what all spiritual practices are about—destabilizing our habitual ways of acting. In some sense, our spiritual practice flirts with chaos. (I am making a distinction here from religion, which is mostly about safety and predictability, but many religions also have a stream of spirituality). This is whole body-mind practice.

Topic 2 Compartmentalism versus Full Integration

Shambhala is a path of full integration. The path of full integration is marked by slowly losing our dependence on compartmentalizing our lives. The prajna is that whether we are firing someone, performing a healing modality on someone, combing our hair, driving, or caring for a loved one, or having sex—it is the same mind of awareness with the same standards of engagement for a Shambhala practitioner: clarity, transparency, presentness, gentleness and vulnerability.

Not being up to this vision is fine. That is why it is called a path. We do always try to stretch ourselves toward full integration of spiritual upayas with our day-to-day living circumstances.

Topic 3 Lies

To give a brief recap: lies are the ultimate model for what happens to us as we get flung into discordant states of consciousness. The way in which we normally react to lies is what creates the bastion, the castle, the dark palace of ego dynamics and enforcing ego dynamics in our activities. This is not about the ethics of lying or not lying in one scenario or another. It is what happens internally to us and the kind of external worlds we create for ourselves and others. Most dynamics of ego creation are not as dramatic as this but those less dramatic creations do happen hundreds of times every day. And, they close us down every time. And, the world of ego creation holds the opinion, all the time, that vulnerability, kindness, compassion and openness are dangerously naïve.

Since we have become used to the idea that society and politics and business (“buyer beware!” as a valid legal argument for NOT being held accountable for lying) must be based on lies, we feel that nothing can change. For this reason, Shambhala and Buddhism can be considered, by some, to be transgressive paths—they undercut the world of lies. Shambhala and Buddhism maintain there are other ways than deception to build society.