

H E A L I N G

teachings by

S o n i a M o r i c e a u

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DEDICATION

To my main teachers

John Garrie Roshi, Namgyal Rinpoche and

Norbu Namkhai Rinpoche

who tirelessly shared their wisdom and compassion,
and to the many students who attended the teachings.

A bow of deep gratitude for your support.

HEALING

We will start the first day with focusing on the aspect of ease; finding ease in your body and calm in your mind. And within the process you ask yourself what is causing ease in your life and what is causing dis-ease in your life? How would you define ease, what is the experience of ease? How do you know when you have ease in your body? How does dis-ease manifest in the body or in the mind? The mind is the intention. So check your life as it is now and ask the question ‘Am I experiencing ease in this situation? Or, what is the cause of this dis-ease?’.

Q: I felt dis-ease in the body but, when I looked for the cause I found it came from the mind, how I was reacting to the situation.

A: Indeed, healing is not something you do, externally, it comes from deep inside yourself and it is a process of the mind.

Transforming the mind is letting go of the unwholesome in ourself, and cultivating the wholesome. In this practice when we talk about healing it is not just about taking away the pain, it is about cultivating a spark, an opening. In that sense there is a difference between being healed and being cured. Healing is a transformation of the mind, even if something cannot be cured it can still be healed. For this to happen you need some tools, you need some help; you cannot do it just by yourself, because it is very big. Check throughout the day, when you are experiencing ease, check it. And also the opposite, when you experience something of dis-ease – what is the cause, the origin of it? See it in your life, your life is now, today; so you are looking at your ease and dis-ease throughout the day to help you with your life review (which we will continue later in the retreat). And don’t forget to cultivate loving-kindness, to be kind to yourself. Because this is a training of the mind, I would like you to have in your mind as a *mantra*: “*sabbe sattā sukhita hontu* – may all beings be well and happy”. It is to replace thoughts you have about being negative. Catch yourself when you are having thoughts that are not cultivating ease and replace these thoughts with the *mantra* of loving-kindness towards all beings.

What is the difference between being healed and being cured?

To be cured is to go back to how it was before, removing the symptoms; healing is to be transformed. Reflect on this, ponder on it; go in and out, sometimes look at the question, sometimes leave it. Come to your own understanding of the difference between being cured and being healed. Many people would think, ‘Healed is a nice idea but I want to be cured, I’ll think about healing later’. Sometimes it is not the case. If you maintain an open heart, even a big suffering will not matter. Suffering, see it as a grace. If you see it as a grace, there is no more suffering – it means letting go of my life as it was before, my future; it is all illusion.

Through suffering you find grace, the open heart. You should do it now, while you are healthy, bouncy. For healing you need to be in a joyful state of mind, spontaneous; it is the same for healing self and others. To see what is good in them, tap into the seed of vitality in them, and in yourself; don’t focus on what is unwholesome or a problem. That is the ultimate healing.

It's all too easy to see yourself as a collection of symptoms rather than as a total human being, including your spirit – and thus to become your illness. Fear is powerful and contagious, and at first I allowed myself to catch it. But now I'm learning to take my healing into my own hands. Healing is not the same as curing, after all; does not mean going back to the way things were before, but rather allowing what is now to move us closer to God.

Ram Dass (Still Here, Riverhead Books, 2000, p.5; also Fierce Grace, DVD)

Q: I have an aunt of 85, her cancer has gone but she's still possessed by fear about it and fear of dying.

A: So you can be cured but not healed, and healed but not cured.

So, check your level of surrender – do I really want to let go of suffering? I will tell you a story. I have a friend who is a healer, working with people who are terminally ill. She first establishes their level of surrender through dowsing and if it is too low, or not there at all, she refuses to treat or help them, not wasting her time and their money. The healing is proportionate to how much, in the depths, they want to get better. On the surface we say 'heal me, give me skills', but in the depths we sabotage it. Remove the veils of ignorance, of delusion – illness, old age, death will come. We have to have a strong desire to get free from suffering, a gut feeling 'I don't want this any more'. Have I come to a place in life when I really want to be free from suffering? Illness is not an obstacle; practising when ill, in trauma or shock, that is the best time to practise. Weaknesses, imbalances are a wonderful opportunity to go deeper – to surrender, to let go. It may not be easy to discover your true intention; on the surface you say 'yes', but under the surface there are challenging patterns, habits, which are difficult to let go.

Q: From personal experience of chronic illness: only when you've discovered that nothing – no treatments or life-changes – works in more than a very limited way and you've gone down and down till you've reached the pits, that's when I really surrendered – letting go of personality, of self-identity.

A: 'Reaching the pits' is because you have to discover that none of your strategies and props have worked. All you can do now is letting go of the rational calculating mind, getting out of the way so there is space for the body-mind to take over.

Meditation on the body

*This body of mine is composed of atoms born in stars,
molecules, cells, tissues and organs.*

It is a union of uncountable virus, bacteria, fungi, plants and animals.

It is conditioned by families and societies, by thoughts and dreams.

It is molded by sun and gravity and the whole of the ecosphere.

It is an inter-being of all these processes from micro to macro.

Wondrous! Transient! May it teach me wisdom!

I will train myself to support, extend and appreciate the life of all living beings.

I will live with a sensitive and responsible awareness for the whole ecology of life.

(Precept 1, from the Five Precepts in Positive Expression, by Tarchin Hearn)

For contemplating these texts you could be sitting outside, leaning against a tree; or at night lying on your back on the ground, under moon and star-light (do wrap up well, and take protection from the damp earth).

Levels of illness

As you breathe in, take in the blue of the sky to the base of your skull. As you breathe out send it down to your sacrum. Repeat this until you are more clear in your body and mind. Then return to awareness in the belly.

In the teachings of Tibetan medicine, there are four levels of illness:

1. *Past life-time influences* – past history. We all carry with us a different set of seeds which can ripen depending on present circumstances. Healing of this level needs Medicine Buddha practice.
2. *Demonic possessions* – hidden forces that drive us, that move us in life - why this tendency, that attraction? Healing these needs is the path of insight meditation and purification which could be through *Vajrasattva* practice, or Medicine Buddha practice.
3. *Transient illnesses*– these will pass, and may need medicine, relaxation and letting go.
4. *Lifestyle patterns* – this level of illness requires a review of what is going on; you need to review your life, change your lifestyle.

Levels four and three overlap a bit, so do one and two. Four and three can be dealt with by a whole range of treatments, therapies, remedies, life-style changes. When we have tried all those and they don't really work, the problem still doesn't move, then we know we are dealing with levels one and two and that stronger remedy is needed.

Meditation is the most active form of healing, of strength; it is a state of mind, not easily distracted, it is mind training. On a scale of the most active to the most passive level of involvement by the 'patient', meditation would come at the top, allopathic medicine and surgery at the bottom. And, in between, forms of energetic body work, including yoga, Qi gong; then come practices for healing the senses such as colour and speech therapy; and lower down, more 'professional' forms of healing such as shiatsu, osteopathy, acupuncture and homoeopathy.

We start with levels 4 - *life-style* and 3 - *transient* which are more on the surface and therefore the most accessible to us. These are more on the conscious levels, when you move upwards in the chart you come to much more unconscious patterns. You are looking at your life and to see the patterns that disturb the flow of life in you, the movement of life. It is important to go through levels four and three first, to be able to know if the illness that you have actually comes from levels one or two.

Lifestyle patterns

The level of lifestyle is again quite conscious and obvious, it is functional and easy to approach: you are looking at how you spend your everyday life, for things that happen that disturb your body, disturb your state of ease. Reviewing your lifestyle patterns gives you the information about what aspects you need to change. Until you spend time on investigating this, you will not know if your illness is coming from a deeper source or from lifestyle.

Life Review

Be somewhere conducive, and when you look at your life patterns make sure your back is leaning against something, for example a tree, a chair. You need something that will make contact with your back. Otherwise you are going to go forward, to look forward.

Before reviewing your life patterns you need to establish loving-kindness in your mind, to establish a calm and generous state of mind, a spacious state. You can do this through body work, walking meditation, or chanting *aham avero homi* (see annex), anything that will bring you to a state of ease within yourself, a happy mind. It is so important because we tend to attack ourselves too much, criticise, put down; then we don't get enough information about our patterns. If you approach it from a state of loving-kindness, of immense kindness to yourself, then you are going to see the patterns much more clearly and then you can do something about them. If you find that you are not being kind to yourself, stop the practice and re-establish kindness to yourself, every time.

If you look at it with kindness you are going to be able to go deeper. So if you are gloomy, depressed or beat yourself up with this practice – go skipping for a while. This was Rinpoche's advice given to me when I was on a one-year retreat. As soon as you feel a little bit dull, depressed - skip to keep the energy positive, otherwise you cannot do the work.

Now look at your life, at three aspects of your life. The first one is the aspect of relationships. The second one is activity, your occupation - how you spend your time. And the third one is environment, your place in the environment - where you live, work and travel - it is where you spend your time, so if you commute to work you include traveling on the underground. When you do the life review it is good to write something down, it helps you to be more present; but if you don't find it helpful to write things down, then don't do it.

Begin gently, from a place of deep calm¹. You need tranquility in body and mind before you can access deeper information, whatever arises, and be able to do something with it, otherwise you will cling, take it personally, and block there. From this place of deep calm look at your life and notice where in your body you lose the calm, where it leaks

¹ You could do the Deep Blue practice which is presented in the Medicine Buddha booklet.

away . A thought, an image may cause you to lose the calm. When that happens, drop the thought, the looking, and re-establish the calm.. Otherwise if you don't return to that calm state you will over-react, go into panic reaction. When you look again from a calm state at the situation, the image, being aware of the bodily feeling that arises with it, then you get information and you know – you know that you know – so you can let go. It must be done from a state of deep calm, not just when something pops up unexpectedly and hits you in the face – that is bound to produce a fear reaction. If you really apply mindfulness, lay it bare, look at it as it is – information will come. It depends on the texture of motivation – if the motivation is too harsh you will be losing the calm. Trust your inner wisdom.

Work, relationships, environment – you are looking for any disturbance of calm in each area that blocks or arrests growth, expansion, happiness. You detect areas of imbalance and in this calm state, focus and say the word that comes up. Go into it re-living, re-working it and write down what body response arises, where or when the calm has gone. How does it affect the organism? How does it affect the body and the mind? If it is mainly a mental / emotional response, something will come up in the body too. When something arises don't think too much about it as an issue, that would lead to fabricating a story. It has nothing to do with opinions about it. Wait and an explanation, further information, will come up later. Stay, and something else will come up – it is like diving, going deeper.

To bring in more structure to the practice, you could focus with a specific question. When you are in a deep state of calm, look at a situation in your life, imagine yourself in that situation, then ask the question: 'Is this wholesome?' Does it give me room to grow, to explore? or 'Is it unwholesome, stopping the movement of growth?' "Is this conducive to my growing?"

The unwholesome, you can feel it in the body, in the mind as contraction, there is no movement, the view is tight and narrow; a sense of blockage, arrested, being paralysed with fear. The wholesome is anything in your life-style, your way of being, that has expansion, promotes going further and a tendency to grow and move on.

Ask the question with no fear, no expectation then watch – is the calm disturbed, is the mind becoming agitated? Let the information come from the depth, not from the discursive mind because you can talk yourself into anything if you want to. Visualising the *lapis lazuli* blue colour helps you to go into the depths, below the ripples. Look into the motivation in the mind. Unless you have contacted the depth you can be swayed. When you have contacted the depth you know it is conducive to growing, to expansion, or not.

Do it meditatively, bring up images in your life and ask 'is this conducive to my ease, to my growing?' Look deeper, calmly.

NB: If you know that something in your lifestyle is bad for you but cannot stop it, look at level 2 - 'demonic possession'.

You ask the question to investigate and you observe – so you bypass the conceptual mind and go straight to ‘how does it feel in the body?’. You stay in contact with your body. To see, feel where the calm is disturbed. I would suggest you do this quite lightly and casually, without criticising yourself. Try this tonight before going to sleep. Try it, lying in bed, establishing blue, asking the question and letting the sleep decide for you – in the morning you will have the answer. Ask the question and get out of the way.

Get the feedback from your body. The practice is not so much in the answer but in daring to ask the question from a place of no expectation, no fear. So the question remains light, happy, and let it go deeper. As Namgyal Rinpoche said: “to establish calm, then wake it up”, not with agitation but with the question. The deep calm enables the question to go deeper, to look deeply. The question may confirm that something is wholesome, so add a different dimension to the question. Or, if it is unwholesome, how to change it to allow growth. Don’t go through aspects of your life and criticise yourself about it, just ask the question. The measure of your practice comes from a review at the end: “do I feel stronger; is there less mental agitation; is there more ease in my body; is my breathing more settled?”.

So you are looking here at patterns that disturb your growth, your wholesome state. We need to move away from positive / negative, rather is it wholesome or unwholesome. I find this much more helpful than to think of right or wrong.

The wholesome invites you to move, to be free to grow, expand, to express yourself, to move in life, explore, take risks, be creative. The unwholesome is something that stops this movement. You need to check how you spend your time in life and look at patterns that are stuck, repetitive patterns that don’t go anywhere. What are the patterns that stop you from moving into life, expanding?

If we cultivate the wholesome through friends, activities, we are going to really grow.

It is not about “do I like it” or about success but are these relationships, activities, food, climate supportive to my growing?

The unwholesome is the *bonsai*, wanting to grow but being clipped down, trimmed back; no room to grow, to expand; this leads to distortion. Distortion in the body comes as a dis-ease, un-ease. When you bring up an aspect, a situation, notice where you feel constrained in the body, where you feel you cannot move?

Approach this with extreme friendliness to yourself; don’t destroy, criticize yourself. You want some information – but without the drama. How does it feel in the body? Come from a place of calm, from the depth – not with an agenda already worked out, not from a place of fear, of contraction. Scan your lifestyle, see where there is some agitation, disturbance in the body, and look further: where is it coming from? Listening, receive it at the body level. Scan your life from a distance, peeling away the layers and you find the core pattern. Once you find that you are no longer the victim of it, you are the master of it.

Something comes up, you keep looking; this is the path of insight meditation, not of thinking. Through observing with mindfulness, bare awareness, the tensions, contractions, grasping liberate themselves. Be aware of the changes happening.

Finally, look at life's turning points, where choices that you made reflect a deep aspiration. When a determined being wanted more than the options she saw around and went for something else. This should cultivate loving kindness towards yourself. What was moving you then? Contact the deeper stream of consciousness, *bavangha*. What was in the stream? Either start from far back or from the present working backwards.

And what are the anchors? For me it is the Zendo. Be warm, comfortable and dig deep into the stream of consciousness. Doing this with past turning points can help with current choices and options. You are looking for and touching on 'right view'. The answer may or may not come as words.

Do this exploration in a real spirit of openness and willingness; not just being seen to practice, going through the motions, not just because the teacher says so as that may hold you back. It will make the work much more easeful and much quicker

Question and answer

Q: A pattern of working too many hours could also come from a different level?

A: Exactly, so it is important to name it and then move on to another level if needed.

Q: What if you know that a job is harmful for your health but because of a mortgage, and other commitments, you can't change it?

A: You have to manage it, to work with it. It is not easy of course, not easy. The practice of loving-kindness is important for this. You can pacify your fear and have a different focus for the situation. It is an invitation to practise; usually when we see something as a problem we want to get rid of it, we want to push it away.

Q: To share from when I was in a difficult situation at work. I learned that if I take the difficulties in, then I can see I have the tendency to create something on top of what is outside – then some of the difficulties melt away and it is more clear and I can see which part I need to look deeper at.

Q: I have a bad back and works long hours.

A: Is there a deeper level?

It is important to know this, so if we go for a massage it is not going to help it. So we need to look deeper, to be more alert. You know the term 'demonic possession'? Do you know yours? It is something that is possessing you, something that is so part of you that you don't know it, you don't recognise it. It influences everything that you do. They are hidden forces you don't see. This is where we need the path of insight; it means looking deeply, you can see all your little tendencies. If you have tried everything and nothing has an impact, then your illness comes from the second level or the first level.

Q: Are the tendencies from this lifetime?

A: They may be from this lifetime but some of them come from further back, but it is very difficult to access that. This is why we need the practice of the Medicine Buddha and of *Vajrasattva*, purification.

You need to see it just as it is, not to push it away or fabricate. The first level is the most difficult to reach, passed down from previous lifetimes. A way to understand it is when we come into the world we have different seeds, potentialities, tendencies; and depending on what happens in this life some of them will open up and grow, or not – the wholesome and the unwholesome. We have genetic information coming from the parents; sometimes it manifests, depending on the circumstances, or not.

Q: What about environmental factors, mass epidemics?

A: That doesn't explain why some people get sick and some do not, or others get sick and then recover, do not die.

The point I am making is we need to practise meditation, insight, to protect ourselves from tendencies; because no matter what we are going to die. So illness is not a mistake, it is part of our life and we have to learn to manage it skillfully, lovingly. For illnesses that come from this life you need medicine; for illnesses that come from the womb you need the practice of *Vajrasattva*, purification; any illness from a previous life goes more deeply, so you need the Medicine Buddha or other deity practices².

Holistic clearing meditation practices

These practices are suitable for the levels 4,3, and 2.

Holistic clearing is a practice for dredging up from the depth what prevents us from making progress in life. We may have superficial awareness of problems but we need to listen more deeply. It is about the preciousness of life, don't take it for granted: so how can I do more to take advantage of this precious life to fulfill my potential? When we are not fulfilling our potential there is a sense of paralysis in life, we may have the idea but not the possibility of improvement.

What are the causes of paralysis? They are:

1. blocks, which prevent you, like having fixed ideas, fixed views
2. lacks, what you are lacking, when you have fixed ideas, you don't explore new things
3. your strength; if you have a really strong specialisation, you invest everything in that and other areas are neglected. Your advantage becomes your disadvantage.

² Vajrasattva and Medicine Buddha practices are in the Purification and Medicine Buddha booklets.

Look at these as a bodily experiences: unlocking, un-paralysing, un-freezing has to happen at a physiological level in the body. Where is my block in the body, how does it feel? Have mindfulness and calm to look at it as it is. We need tools to avoid too much thinking, dialogue, and too much emotion. Feel it directly, cut through thinking and emotion and ‘let the sin liberate itself’. You are gardening, weeding in the body.

Bodhicitta is the drive to get better: ‘I want something better, there must be another way’. *Bodhi* means enlightenment, being fully awake; *citta* means the mind.

It is good if there is an underlying restlessness in life, even when things are going well. That is the drive of *bodhicitta* and energy. Get “me, I, self” out of the way and ride on this energy that we all have. Truly relax and let it happen as it is; no big emotion around it, no embroidery. Dig deep for your obvious. Don’t focus on the negative, that has a tendency to block, contract, freeze; blocks don’t move. This is why we normally focus on the negative, because it is so present. Strength moves, by nature it is dynamic, it flows and therefore more difficult to catch. There is a deeper strength: the strength to know has a familiar code of identity. You will contact the deeper strength through exploration. The teaching of holistic clearing comes to us from Namgyal Rinpoche, you will not find it anywhere else. He has given it to us as a practice for modern times.

Holistic means total. You need to establish a place in yourself where you can find safety and return to balance, flexibility. The key is breathing – it gives an indication of blocks, justifications. Letting go of that requires humility, openness. So be at ease, relaxed, spacious. Notice the tightening, contraction of awareness around a thought, then soften. Relax the body, soften the attention. You must start from a place of calm, not too much discursive thoughts. Then the depth speaks to you and blows away your little plans.

Holistic clearing: Meditation on strengths

Suitable for the levels 4,3 and 2.

During the day, identify your many strengths - twenty-one strengths, big and small ones. These can be characteristics or skills that you have acquired. Make a list in advance. Then later, leave your list and prepare for the holistic clearing with body work (see Body Work booklet) or mindfulness of breathing† to come to a place of mind-body calm. This enables you to have more distance, and to have energy to go deeper and not give up. It is very important to come to this practice from stillness, quietness; being restful, peaceful, in deep calm to be able to look deeply without fear or expectation; if there is expectation you are going to fabricate. So the preparation is very important.

† By gently focusing on your breathing in your belly, in and out, for a while

The whole practice is about getting away from ideas about your strengths, from discursive thought; forget them and focus on sensations ‘in the body’.

1. Begin to identify with your strengths by plugging into positive ‘events’ like a meeting with a friend, scenery, landscape, happy conversation. Begin to work them, connect with them, embody them. How do they feel in the body; let it expand in the body. Feel well and good.
It is easier to focus on the negative. Physiologically the positive has a tendency to expand, to flow. So it is easier - physiologically – to connect with the negative where there is contraction, solidity, stuck-ness. Yet stay with the positive association and feel it more and more.
2. Then line up a list of at least five strengths. As you remember these, compare and experience their different tones. Don’t be too regimented. You can go back and forth, move from one to the other and feel, see the differences by playing with shades of happiness. Then narrow the list to three and it becomes more serious, more real. Spend longer with each one to really feel it in the body. Explore them at random.
3. Then select one, the one with the strongest feeling of potential for growth, for change, the strength that will take you further. Really go fully into it, a ‘body in the body’ experience; your whole body is totally submerged in that feeling, that bodily sensation. Then try to find a word that represents it and repeat it silently on the out-breath, until you find yourself silently at a deep place where everything feels very strong. A new word may be revealed, repeat it again, refine it. Really focus on the body, you want to get to the heart essence of that feeling. It can also be a feeling of ‘not knowing’, open-ended.
4. Ask the revelation question – choose the timing – ‘where is this going?’, ‘What does it reveal, where to go next?’. You could ask ‘what is my path in life?’. You are at the depth level, dredging: ‘what is my vision?’, ‘where do I want to go onto from here?’. You send the question deep into your unconscious; like fishing, listen with all your senses and watch the ripples of it. Don’t expect an answer straight away; the most important thing is to have asked the question. You might get just a sight, a flashing picture, a feeling in the body, a taste, smell. Maybe an answer comes later when you are more casual. Stay in touch and it will lead you where you are wanting to go. It gives you confidence to do what you are doing in life, following the stream.
5. To listen to the stream you could take time out, be quiet, in nature, and see what comes up. Stay with the question – ‘where is this going?’ ‘what is my path?’ – in non-clinging awareness. No dialogues about negatives, stay focused on the positive.

Then let it settle, do a short review - you could make a drawing; go outside and pick flowers, whatever. It is important to reflect on what has happened and not just let it go. You can return to the practice on another occasion and go quicker into the depth. With repetition you are well in touch with the depths, the stream; it is a way of certain decision making. Do it regularly, once a week is good, and allow a full hour to do the practice so you have time to reflect. This is an important practice for people involved in healing work because it focuses on strength, on what is strong in you.

There is a difference between being 'cured' and being healed, being restored to your energetic balance.

Question and answer

Q: Sudden sharp pains and twitching around the body during the meditation – what do they mean?

A: It could be from the posture. But more likely that it is movement of energy into areas that have been stagnant or empty.

Q: What identifies the one strength after the revelation question?

A: Positive feelings, lightness, joy.

Q: What causes negative blocking feelings, like a blank wall?

A: You may feel a block if your life, your options are limited at the moment, but the depth will surface again when circumstances change – like underground water seeping through, re-surfacing anywhere.

Transient illnesses

We can access these easily as we are quite conscious of them. Transient illnesses come and go, they are something that passes quickly, like a headache because of lack of food, lack of sleep and the next day you feel off colour. These illnesses need not much attention, they will pass anyway. We rest and let them pass. So at this level, there is no need to make a big deal of it. Namgyal Rinpoche said ‘if you have a headache take an aspirin’. Something that doesn’t need much, just relaxation, common sense; just see what the problem is and do something about it – take some rescue remedy if needed! But if you keep catching a cold, or always at the same time of year – it is a tendency, so you would need to look further at your lifestyle. And with recurrent patterns like migraine, if you look deeper you see that those come from a ‘demonic possession’, but at first you could think it is ‘transient’ or an aspect of ‘lifestyle’.

With ‘flu or just the common cold, a tummy bug, toothache, the body can be very expressive, physical distress is at the surface. So this is a good time to practise awareness of bodily sensations without being caught up in emotional reactions; knowing the transience, knowing that it will pass. How do I know that I have a cold, how does it feel in the body? The physical aspects of suffering, everything is an opportunity for practising mindfulness of the body! And having the symptoms of the common cold is a reason for celebration, because they are evidence that the body’s immune system is working as it should.

Bone breathing

This practice is suitable for the levels 4 and 3.

In traditional Chinese medicine the bones are thought to be the source of *chi*, so this exercise is to balance energy in the body. Put a rolled towel length-ways under the top of the back; this is optional, take it away if you want. Allow the breath to settle then start:

- Breathe in through the left foot and up to the hip, breathe out through the left leg; repeat a minimum of seven times. Then do the same with the right leg. Have awareness of which leg felt more difficult to get in touch with. Finally, with one long in-breath and a long out-breath, go up the left leg, across the hips, and down through the right leg.
- Breathe in up the left arm, from hands to shoulder, and out through the left arm; repeat a minimum of seven times. Then do the same with the right arm. Have awareness of which arm felt more difficult to get in touch with. Finally, with one long in-breath and a long out-breath, go up the left arm, across the shoulders, and down through the right arm. It is healing, feel the solidity and the warmth.

- Breathe in up the spine, from the base up to the top of the spine, to the base of the occipital; and breathing out, go down again all the way through the sacrum to the tail bone.
- Then the skull, breath in starting from the base at the back, up and over to the front, ending around the third eye. Breath out going back from third eye to the base of the skull at the back.

If you cannot get the breath into an area, it means there will not be any *chi* in the area. Find ways to get breath into, for example the back, by visualising the breath like a waterfall or a stream of light.

Healing the senses

This practice is suitable for both levels 4 and 3.

Do this work outside for maybe half an hour, minimum twenty minutes; make yourself comfortable, be in an easeful position. Contact the sense and bathe each sense in light. Move on to the next sense when a body sensation tell you to; notice if it is the head pushing the body!

1. *The sense of hearing*: start with the right ear, bathe both the external and the inner ear in light; then the left ear. Breathing into the ears feel vitality, warmth; breathing out softening, letting go. Then the same with the radiant ear in the centre of your head; the divine ear, this is non-duality, find it intuitively. If you listen with this ear it makes total sense, you hear in a way you have not heard before.
2. *Sight*: start with the right eye, bathe and radiate light into it, then the left eye and then the third eye, the divine eye – find it with your awareness. Breathing into the eyes feel vitality, warmth; breathing out softening, letting go.
3. *Smell*: each nostril, starting with the right and then the left. Bathe each nostril in light. Breathing into the nostrils feel vitality, warmth in all the parts; breathing out softening, letting go.

The nostrils are just the end points of very fine energy lines that go up into the brain at the top of the head, round the side and down the spine, gathering at the *hara* point below the navel. Centering is sometimes done at the bridge of the nose, or the tip of the nose.

4. *Taste*: start with the base of the mouth, below the tongue, and lower lip, bathe them in light. Breathing in feel vitality and warmth; breathing out softening, letting go. Then the same for the roof of the mouth and upper lip. Then centered at the tongue for divine taste, all of the tongue or just the tip. Bathe all parts in light and breathing in feel vitality, warmth; breathing out soften and let go. This exercise is also to do with concentration.
5. *Touch*: bathe the whole right side of the body, including left side of the head, in light; breathing in feel vitality and warmth in that side; breathing out, soften and

- let go. Do the same for the left side of the body and head. Then the spine or the central channel inside the body, which is the inner spine.
6. "*Mind*": repeat the same process first for the left brain (the logical side) and then with the right brain (the creative side); finally for the whole brain.

Finally bathe all in light. At the end, come back to the rise and fall of the belly and out of the meditation on the third out-breath. Then be fifteen minutes outside walking in nature. This practice can also be done as an exercise with a partner, as giver and receiver, to heal weakness, imbalances. Guide your partner through the whole sequence twice, first right side then left, then a third time for the centre, swiftly like a waterfall.

Further suggestions for practice for all levels of illness

Be outside, lying down; listen to sounds, for twenty minutes. When the mind becomes calmer, you can hear very far away, faint sounds. If you catch yourself thinking, bring your mind back to the sounds. Afterwards record how many kinds of sounds you were able to hear. Were you present, really hearing them?

Contemplate on the following texts:

The Ancient Blessing on Wayfarers

That on your way your skin may know the touch of the thread of a thousand silk worms.

That in your nostrils there will rise the perfume of jasmine,

and in your mouth the taste of honey.

That your ears may hear the rush of the eagle's wing, and the rustling of bamboo.

That your eyes may behold the elephant walking through the rainbow.

And that in your consciousness there may rise

the bright diamond point of the Dhamma-Kaya of clear pure mind.

(JGarrie Roshi)

I will train myself to use the senses to further awakening, explore Dharma, and to come to know the world more profoundly and more compassionately.

(Precept 3, from the Five Precepts in Positive Expression, by Tarchin Hearn)

Demonic possession

*To observe how and when a contraction of awareness occurs around any mental impression that arises, then a “being” is born in that moment.
If the impression is a pleasing memory, with this contraction or grasping, the thought “I am happy” takes root, “a happy being is born” and as with all that is born, this “happy being” will also die.*

Demonic possession: it is the being that is still grasping, reaching out for an old story and feeding it. It is informing our action, our speech, our life-style and our relationships. We need to discover where it is coming from; what am I holding onto?

The key words are contraction, awareness and grasping. The contraction of awareness is not the problem, it is that we are grasping and clinging.

“Whatever being is born is certain to pass away”. So why do we hold on so long?

The demonic possession are the hidden dialogues in our life. We have hidden drives, hidden needs we hold on to.

The levels 4 and 3 of illness about how we spend our time (*transient and life-style*) are easy to see. Once we have sorted out those two categories then we can go deeper into the mind to heal the demonic possessions..

Recollect an incident and watch the mind contracting, holding on, holding tighter: this is the cause of many diseases. Contraction of awareness is an experience in the body, a contraction, something stopping movement. Contraction is grasping and you are doing the grasping, holding it, and with the holding you are becoming something, it gives you a sense of existing. At that moment when you are practising the unwholesome, you arrest the movement of change – you, not the event. It is you who contracts, stops.

Look at how this contraction arises and how you add to it. Then what do you do to it?

Did you make a story out of it, engage other people, or take action to make sure it doesn't happen again?

Just meet it with choice-less awareness, then it passes away. It will liberate itself!

Whatever is arising, it is within itself that it will pass away – it doesn't need another condition for it to pass away. All you need to do is take your hands off.

We are the makers of our own suffering and have in ourselves the possibility to end that suffering.

In looking at your life, you are going to meet your demonic possessions anyway. There are many 'beings' in your life that you are holding onto. We all have demonic possessions, otherwise you would not be human. We all have contractions, it is how you hold onto them. You are opening yourself to unwholesomeness from within and without because you are stopping the flow.

When recollecting an incident start with calming body and mind through breathing and visualising blue, then look at relationships, occupation, environment, not as a list, more casually at whatever comes up. You have to evoke an incident, a trigger, otherwise if you are just in deep calm, nothing will happen.

Q: What is demonic?

A: Thoughts, attitudes that are very strong, they are demons that possess us, make us who we are. They are so much part of ourselves that they are hidden – that is why we have to go deep into ourselves and look. With this category of illness we can work simply with the practice of insight – to look at whatever is arising and let it go. This is the ultimate healing. I don't know a doctor who specialises in anger, hatred, desire, confusion.

Q: How to recognise contraction in the mind?

A: Contraction could be being impatient about something, having fixed ideas about what should happen, wanting it to be in a particular way. In every moment there is a being with ideas, for example a being wanting to do the practice or having opinions about how it should be done.. That is OK, that is wholesome, but then let go of the wanting and just get on with it, Not right or wrong, just be with what is happening in a particular moment. As you let it pass, you give room for something fresh to arise, fresh in the moment. We are all the time holding on. In each moment a being is born, be aware of that, then soften and the next moment a different being is born. So we go into a much deeper, a more unconscious level.

To reach this level you need a deeper method: the path of insight meditation.

To help you understand this level I want to teach you about the three characteristics: the acquisitive, the averse, the confused:

- Greed, *lobha*: the *acquisitive* types, are in pursuit of delight, looking for happiness through gratification of the sense desire. The state of mind is most often associated with grasping, wanting, not having enough. In a new situation they select what is pleasing, beautiful and feel most attracted to; they associate with people they find interesting and pleasing.
- Hatred, *dosa*: the *averse* types define themselves by rejecting, taking an oppositional stand. The state of mind is most often associated with pushing away the world through judging, criticising, disliking, aggression. In a new situation they see what is wrong, how they would not do it, what should be changed, what displeases them.
- Delusion, *moha*: the *confused* types are associated with lethargy, delusion, they are disconnected, not knowing what to make of things or what is going on. In a new situation they look around, become restless, they don't know how to relate to what is going on, and ask themselves 'how do I fit? what am I supposed to do?' They withdraw.

We all have the tendency to respond in life with one of these patterns – greed, hatred or delusion. So imagine a situation in life: how do you respond with an acquisitive tendency? Wanting more and more, ‘what’s in it for me?’ It is about what is pleasing this person, based on desire.

With an aversive tendency you will be critical, quick-tempered, angry. This type of person will see everything as wrong, nothing is good enough.

And if you are the confused type, you meet a new situation with disconnectedness.

So you can see as “demonic possession” something that is so deep in you that you don’t even know you have it, that is why it is called demonic. Investigate which type are you. Of course we all have all the three types in us but in times of crisis, with your back against the wall, which type are you? And how does it feel in body, speech and mind?

There is good news though, through mindfulness, you can transform those three states! In each state are the seeds for transformation:

Acquisitive: you can transform the wanting into a natural and compassionate state and into generosity which brings beauty and pleasure into the world

Aversion: you can transform the hate state into a very sharp discriminating mind with a lot of clarity and wisdom. So your speciality is using wisdom and clarity to help and heal.

Confusion: with more mindfulness you can transform this state into spacious equanimity. So know that in your suffering there is the seed for transformation and this transformation can lead you to spacious equanimity. That is within the confusion, not outside it. It is not that you sort out the confusion then you get the spacious equanimity, it is already there in the confusion.

Behind each distorted view there is the seed for something very beautiful. Your disadvantage becomes your advantage! You don’t have to fight what you are, you just need to transform it. You need the path of insight meditation or the Medicine Buddha practice to transform it. Then you will be able to transform these tendencies into liberation.

In terms of illness once you have tried everything you can: attended to your lifestyle, changed your diet, tried homoeopathy, acupuncture and nothing changes. This is a sure sign that you have to go deeper into the practice. And: notice that the remedy is the path of insight ! It means that we have to cultivate deep calm, to see through the layers.

At this level we need some device to bring them out in order to heal them. The thinking mind cannot do that, it will fabricate. It is a big question to ask, to find out, why this tendency? For example if someone works too much and you ask them why they do it, the

answers will be only part truth (needing the money, seeking status). You have to go deeper to contact the real source.

One practice to deal with this is working with the face. It is going back to the original face. You do some work to dredge up your different faces, you bring them out, you expose them. You are seeing them as they are with bare attention. It is through the power of just seeing them, of mindfulness that they dissolve, liberate themselves. It is the closest you can get to “going back in time”. It is very powerful work.

Meditation on the Face

You need to have gone through some preparatory face exercises so that little tensions in the face are eased out. Once you have established enough calm you will be strong enough to look at what is disturbing the being, the unwholesomeness which is blocking growth. It can happen and pass quickly or the expression can be fixed, the facial expression feels arrested. We are touching now on demonic possessions – they are very deep and can go back to birth or the womb experience. Don't do this practice unless you really have established calm because either nothing will happen or you play games with yourself, frighten yourself, fabricate stories. Visualising lapis lazuli blue will help you to drop deeply into the stream of consciousness. The face practice needs energy so be relaxed, not exhausted; be in a good space.

Prepare with the following face exercises through:

1. scanning the face, the muscles, its expressions and go back to this scanning after each stage. See if there is a difference between the right and left side.
2. yawning, for five minutes
3. adopting different facial expressions, moving directly from one to the next: surprise, shock, disgust, lying, honesty, fear, panic, intimidating or to frighten someone, peacefulness, anticipation, charm, satisfied or contentment, anger, grief, pain. This starts more externally and will become more inward.

After this move into the lying down posture for the meditation on the face and bathe the eyes in blue, as if you are looking at deep night blue sky. This is to settle the breathing and establish calm. Blue is a very calming colour; it has a physiological relaxing effect on the body, and it is also takes away fear. Then focus just on the face, on the facial expressions and muscles of the face. Become aware of something moving in the face, little movements or twitchings, let it happen. The face will go through different expressions naturally, through layers of expressions. Lots of expressions are all the time passing through the face. Then as you go through the depth, “down the stairs”, the face finally comes to a place where it sets, gets stuck; you meet an expression that seems quite fixed, doesn't change. This is the face of the demonic possession that is driving you, unconsciously, that controls your life. Something happens – an image of you aged four,

or whatever. Witness, just notice it – don't even name it. Don't think or fabricate. You are dredging up, excavating. Stay with it, give it *lapis lazuli* blue, and gradually it unfolds, starts to shift, loosen up, and it is freed – it does that, not you. The sign of it being freed is that you feel more energy, creativity, you view the world differently because you get a different response from the world. Because the demons have been freed, and the energy they were draining has been released.

In your own time stop, get up and walk around.

Opening the heart

This practice is suitable for all levels of illness

When we talk about transforming our tendencies, which factor is most important for healing? It is often a quality that is forgotten actually. I am looking for a universal quality.

Q: Patience? Is it gentleness?

A: Yes! It is opening the heart, gentleness, loving-kindness, spaciousness, softness. Patience comes into it, but it is actively opening the heart. If you don't open the heart your practice can be very hard, very busy, you may be bullying yourself. Transformation of tendencies has to involve the heart. So I am going to introduce you to the practice of Opening the Heart.

Q: You said to imagine a cushion behind my back and that has helped me so much. It was so much effort before, trying to get it right, doing too much.

A: You want a friend. Don't beat yourself up when there is no need for that. Just open your heart!

1. First we establish deep calm in the body. Imagine that you have a fine silk cloth or a soft mist of *lapis lazuli* blue touching the body, covering the body. Take some time to establish this deep calm in the body; don't try too hard, just gently, softly.
2. Now recall a pleasant event, a happy event in your life. Notice the sensation in your chest changing. There may be a slight sensation of lightness, of softening, of warmth. Now expand that sensation in your chest. Opening the heart, expanding the heart; the sensation as you have it now, imagine it expanding to your sides. Try to maintain the awareness of the deep blue and as you breathe in and out the sensation expands. Then let it expand upwards and downwards. So you have the sensation moving side to side, front and back, and up and down. Now imagine rays of light shining out from your heart into the four directions, to the front, to the right, behind you and to the left.
3. Now imagine your heart being held by someone you trust, gently touched, with one hand at the front of your body, one hand at the back. Imagine being held at your heart, very softly, no pressure, a very light touch. Stay with this image, with the sensation that comes with it. Allow yourself to be touched at the heart, to soften.

4. Once you are feeling supported, held inside and from outside, you in turn imagine holding the heart of someone in need. Imagine placing your hand at the front and back of the body of someone in need. Your touch, your presence, is inviting them to let go of fear. It is important that your heart remains open, even in the face of the suffering of others.

Explore how the out-breath is in your body, how it feels in the body; it is the expression of a willingness to let go.

Holistic clearing: Meditation on the Positive

Suitable for the levels 4,3 and 2

This is the first meditation you do when you want to do holistic clearing. Start with the positive so you have more strength for working with the negative, more compassion, more back-up.

The practice of holistic clearing is to really unlock your potential. A strength, a positive can sometimes become a hindrance, a block, if you focus too much on it. It can become your weakness! Thinking that meditation should make me happy, that is in the head. The positive, the negative: does it feel in the body? Don't trust the head. What is the bodily sensation, what is your gut feeling? (*to a student*: It is easy to see when you are thinking, the head bows, you look to one side or the other.) A sense of connection, acceptance, no thinking, just being, the feeling of an infant. This practice reminded me of how I felt as a child – open, trustful, more innocent. As a child it was almost a permanent state and now they are just glimpses.

1. First you go shopping. Select ten different things in your life that are positive, ten moments of wellness, positivity. It could be anything from reading a book, stroking your cat, coming into the Zendo, a hike in the mountains. The ten moments each have a different quality, a different texture. Coming into the Zendo may touch me in my belly, reading a book may touch me in my heart, in a different place. Do a comparison between them, compare one with the other. Each one has different texture. How does it feel in the body? “Ah, that's how it feels, wellness”.
Wellness, positivity creates a feeling of expansion, spaciousness; the negative gives a feeling of contraction. You often hear me say to you ‘how do you know you feel...? “how does it feel in your body, what is the texture in the body?”
2. From ten you want to narrow it down to four. You choose the four that have more depth, the strongest potential in them.
You go more thoroughly into the comparison between the four, try to feel it in the body again. You can go one, two, three, four, back and forth, play with the different feelings. Evoke the situation, the memory, and then out of the four you choose one to go even deeper – or the one that chooses you, the one that jumps

out at you.. The one you choose is the one in which you sense a strong potential. It is the one where you know there is something more to it. You enter into an echo of that positive feeling and it is like a thread, you borrow a memory from the past and live it in the present now. And with this one, you go into the total 'in the body' experience of it. Total – you indulge in it, you swim in it, taste it, you smell it, you go for it – feel it through all your senses.

3. Then find a word that describes this experience to you, and you repeat this word silently with the breath –warmth, excitement, whatever word it is. Repeat the word with the out-breath to make the word even stronger in the body. As you repeat the word it may change because the sensation in the body changes so the word changes. At some point you find there is no more change happening, you have gone through deeper layers of experience.
4. This is where you ask the question: “what is this, why does this have the strongest potential?”. As you ask this question, you may jump into another feeling, another texture, so stay with that in the body. There is a moment in the practice when it will become clearer, you can also ask another question: ‘what is my vision?’, ‘where is this going next?’. Throughout the meditation it is very important that you don’t go into a story, into fantasizing. We want so much the answer, we fabricate one. The answer may come through any one of the senses, a smell, a taste, not just through a word. The answer may not come straight away, so after this meditation you spend some time in nature.

After the practice it is important that you do a review – in nature – and maybe then you get more insight. It is a very deep practice, a subtle practice. But also easy. If you are going into memories, you can get an echo of the feeling and that takes you into the body. You borrow a memory from the past and that leads you into the present.

What you are going to experience is a shift, a new sense of potential. When you have gone deep enough into the depth you unlock your potential, a new sense of space. It is like being very relaxed, going deeper and deeper asking the question, don’t get involved in thinking. It is important that you don’t have a dialogue with your negatives. You will feel in the body maybe a trembling, a shaking – but something will be unlocked. You have to be like a witness, a spectator, listen to the instructions as they come and be a witness, go into it. You could do the practice last thing at night before going to sleep and you will continue the practice in your dream state. And when you wake up there will be a sense of freshness.

Holistic clearing: Meditation on the negative

This meditation practice is suitable for levels 3 and 4

Most suffering is psychological, nourished by fear and our identification with the pain.

It is important to break down the idea that it is our suffering, our fear.

Concentrate on the feeling, the texture, not on thoughts about it.

Concentrate on the centre of the feeling. Penetrate into that space.

There is a density of energy in that centre that is clear and distinct.

This energy has great power and can transmit great clarity.

What is disturbing your growing in your life, what is interrupting the expansion? In this meditation as soon as your mind fills with stories about yourself, stop and return to the body, to what is happening there. We are too much overtaken by our pain, suffering. It is not yours, no ownership; it is just an event, no clinging. Physical pain can be dealt with, psychological suffering is more difficult to unlock. We feel: ‘this is *my* pain’. The technique is to go back to the body. How do I know there is for example irritation, how does it manifest in the body? This is the heart of the practice. Bare noticing, bare attention. Physical heat, where does it come from? Don’t wrap it up in opinion. Pain is sensation in the body plus opinion. If you go right to the centre of a pain, physical or psychological and name it as you feel it in the body, at its centre there is a lot of energy to be freed up. Fully being present for the sensation in the body, not the idea how we feel about it. “You have not got a headache, the headache has got you”. Strength is the movement of positive expansion. The movement of the unwholesomeness is contraction, that is why it tends to draw you in, swallows you up.

So you have to be very vigilant with yourself, how does it feel in your body? It is a beautiful moment, focusing on the body, and if you have a wave of anger just watch it, as heat, don’t lean into it; just watch and the mind will let go. Don’t enter into conversation with your thoughts. Create a new habit, to stop and come back to the body. It needs great courage, be vigilant, be right there, very present.

With the unwholesome don’t start with a biggie, just a smallie. Think of it as a rehearsal, we are trying it out, you are training. When a story starts, come back to the body quickly, immediately. Catch the monkey mind. Don’t wait to hear the end of the story, then you are lost; just drop it and return to the body feeling. Mind is very fast, the body is very slow. The mind will play many tricks not to get back to the body. What we call ‘negative’ is not reality, that is wrong; it is just a movement of energy, blocking like a dam, being held up. You have the physical body and the psychic body, which goes beyond the physical – look at the whole body, psychic and physical. Basically first maintain uprightness, not leaning into your story, it is research, gathering data; it is not really *you*. You are trying to shift what you have been doing all your life, to change the habit pattern.

Track the physical sensation, follow it: “oh, it is moving to my shoulder, to my head, to my eyes”. This may start with a posture, then after a while it becomes much more subtle, an impulse. For example in an everyday life situation you have a moment of anger, note it and walk on. All you need is bare attention and then that deals with it itself. If it is difficult to connect with the sensations, take that as the object of attention, whatever comes up. Name whatever is happening in the body at the moment: e.g. a shield – name its shape, colour; stay with the sensation otherwise it becomes a concept, disconnecting you from the body sensation. The practice is to make you go deeper into the sensation. All the defenses we have in life start as sensations, the mind then makes concepts out of them. The shield is to stop you from feeling, for protection. There is nothing right or wrong, the shield is not wrong. Whatever block in the body you notice it, give attention that is bare. No judgment, just notice, not another story like: “If I breathe deeper everything will be well”, “If I did hours of meditation”, etc.

Q: What is the Psychic body?

A: The psychic body is greater than the physical body, more subtle, more an image of yourself.

Q: Why not to start with the big one?

A: Because the big unwholesome is ready to jump on you as you have fed that one for many years. For example, the idea of studying anger brings on confusion, so drop the anger and stay with the confusion, catch the sensation and stay with it. Catch and drop the monkey mind.

You have read in the text, above: in the centre of suffering there can be ‘*great clarity*’ and great happiness. In the midst of great suffering there can be great happiness, they are not mutually exclusive.

Remember first practise with the positive so you have more strength for working with the unwholesome, more compassion, more back-up.

To prepare, practise being happy, centered and grounded in the body.

1. Establish calm first with the chanting of *Aham Avero Homi*, breathing or body work. You need to come from a place of calm, not from deep tiredness. If you are excited, agitated, fearful, anxious, then it is not the time to go investigating. So you have to calm these states first before doing the practice. That goes against the ‘norm’, ‘ordinariness’ as we tend to approach a problem from the place of anxiety.
2. Check your aspiration for doing the practice, your deep wish. Set your intention which is always something that is positive like ‘may I find more information about my state for the benefit of self and others’. Be respectful, calm, caring. All this is preparation.

3. Now select two situations from the past and two from the present that disturb your ease, bring discomfort in your being. You can select anything, it is like picking up the thread, eventually it will take you to the 'big one'. You can break it up into distinct sections like job, relationships, environment. In each of these four situations study the texture of what it is that is disturbing the ease. Don't stay too long, just make contact at this stage.
4. Out of the four you select one. Go deeper by allowing change in posture to manifest the sensation which the situation evokes. Name the state you find yourself in and repeat the word mentally. With the 'negative' it is to with contraction so you go into that contraction and if you don't censor it, it takes over and it does you. At some point the movement begins to slow down and finally goes into a frozen posture, called the full statement of your block. This is the beginning of the resolution phase. Stay with it, name it, find a new word for it and ask the question 'what is it?', 'what is it?'. When you have reached the resolution word, through the power of just naming it, the body begins to uncoil, unwind; it shifts by itself, "you" don't do it. You can feel the body shaking out of this corner that it has been in. Use the energy which was stored in the block to move into the positive.

*There is a density of energy in that centre that is clear and distinct.
This energy has great power and can transmit great clarity.*

In the beginning your practice may not go through the resolution stage. Then next time start this practice with "the one" which you now already know.

The time after the session is very important. Make sure you have a full hour to ease out, to reflect. Tonight in bed, look back at the day and just pick out a few moments of comfort and ease and go to sleep with those memories, that feeling. Today, tomorrow, any time you may have a feeling of irritation, aloneness, tiredness; name it, feel it in the body and drop it, move on. Take the habit of referring back to the body – posture, breathing, facial expression, gesture.

Previous life-time

Another even deeper level of illness which is difficult to access, are past-life illnesses. These can include womb experiences from when you were in the belly of your mother, and genetic make-up. When you come into the world you come with tendencies, some come from parents and some from previous lifetimes. Tendencies can manifest from past history and previous patterns. Something from the past is a seed and factors from the now can make this seed to open. It is not wrong, it is not a failure. If you see all this as seeds which may ripen or not, see them as potentials. With this level of illness only the Medicine Buddha , Vajrasattva or other Buddha practices will help (see Purification and Medicine Buddha booklets). If you have tried all kinds of treatment and still the condition, the illness, doesn't change – then you have to practise meditation, or have someone else do it for you. It is more powerful though if you do it yourself. Don't drop the other treatments, but add meditation to it. Maybe in this category of illness you may not be cured, but you are using your illness to study the mind, to liberate mind, to be healed. Illness is a welcome gift to you and others around you, but it takes time to feel into this as a gift and not a hindrance. Health is not synonymous with happiness and illness is not synonymous with a problem but teaches you to slow down, do other things in your life, to prioritize. It helps you to change the point of view that you have about old age, pain and suffering. Illness takes away the innocence of ignorance, the arrogance. We need to be real: the innocence of ignorance does not help us at the final day. Illness teaches you to 'wake up!'.

Don't waste time with worldly thoughts, useless things. This level of illness is difficult to make contact with, you need to reach the level of an enlightened being to understand what is really the deep root cause. Don't make judgments on people, "she got cancer because...". Do the *lapis lazuli* blue practice, go deep, you may reach insights into your past life life. When we ask the question 'what is the root cause of my dis-ease?' don't expect an immediate answer. And possibly, even if there are tiny glimpses from a past life, we can't make sense of them. So stay with the present, sit on your cushion. You may not be enlightened but you will die happy. *Lapis lazuli* will change the chemistry in your body and mind state. If you are not well it is a gift to others – slow down, be gentle, remove the veils of ignorance. And the practice we do will help us to be ready for the unplanned. You don't know when it happens. For example Ram Dass's sudden stroke, a *dharma* friend's riding accident, being unable to plan for imminent death.

In every moment there is a becoming and a passing away and if we halt the movement by holding on to the present or to past memories, we miss the passing away. Life is transient!

So don't make a big deal about past-life, *karmic* illness. *Karma* is not fixed, not static, it can be changed! *Karma* means that past actions have conditioned the present, but also that present actions condition the future. So if you concentrate on positive actions in the present you are planting wholesome seeds for the future!

“If we want to know our past, we only need to look at how we are now, we are the product of what we have practised. If we want to know our future, we only need to look at what we are practising now; all that happens has results, it matters what we do. Recognising this, may I ever be watchful how my body (actions), speech (what I say) and mind (thoughts) shape this moment and the next.

We come back to motivation. Ask yourself this question: ‘what is the purpose of my life?’ Then you can come to terms with suffering. Through your suffering you can cultivate compassion, acceptance which in turn will help other beings. Realize also that you are always in a state of teaching by your example. Each one is teaching everybody by how we are. The motivation is so important, the drive of your mind. Why am I here?

I invite you to write your own text of motivation, to make a few sentences that express your motivation in this life. So whenever you come back to your motivation you will be very happy whatever happens in your life. We are asking for deeper motivation in life that carries us over to the other side. Again to know, to hear your deeper motivation you need to be very calm. You will be surprised at the strength of your motivation.

I find it important in my life to check with myself ‘what is my deep motivation?’ It keeps me on the right path.

Annex

Chanting of the Four Divine Abidings – the Four Brahma Vihāras

First imagine your body hollow, empty from the top of your head down to your toes, only space. Establish this feeling of space inside your body. Now notice the movement of your belly. Notice the rising and the falling and be with that, simply noticing rising, falling. Rising, falling within space, within emptiness. If you become too distracted go back to the spaciousness, the hollowness of the body. Establish again the space within the body, then return to the belly.

Now chant the *Brahma Viharas*, in *Pali*, three times:

*Aham avero homi, abyāpajjho homi, anigho homi,
sukhi attānam pariharāmi.
Aham viya sabbe sattā avera hontu, abyāpajjhā hontu, anighā hontu,
sukhi attānam pariharantu.*

And, for contemplation, spoken once in English:

*May I be friendly, calm and free from ill-will and may I live in happiness.
As I am, so may all beings be friendly, calm and free from ill-will
and may they live in happiness.*

In the *Brahma Vihāras*, ‘*homi*’ means self, so have good feelings towards yourself, shower yourself with loving-kindness. ‘*Hontu*’ means others, so do that to each one in the room, you are radiating good feelings towards others. There is a pulsation, ‘as I am... may others be...’. When you do the chanting imagine a flower in your heart, it grows and grows to fill the whole room until you are all sitting together within the shape of a flower, and I am the stem. And in the sitting we can experience the attention of the mind rising above the crown of the head, then feel the energy fields of everyone in the room joined together above our heads, like a girdle around the room. So we are turning the mind to awakening, with *wholesome* thoughts, with ‘reflections to turn the mind to awakening’, thoughts that take the mind further.

Main sources

Holistic Clearing, September 2008
 Calm Abiding and Insight, October 2006
 Guided Retreat, 2005
 Holistic Clearing, May 2004
 Medicine Buddha retreats from 2011, 2009, 2007, 2006, 2004

Notes

The intention has been to present Sonia's words as she spoke, to preserve the flavour and the spirit of her teaching. Anything else is in italics: contributions from students, texts, editing links, other languages (mainly *Pali*).

Only one significant aspect of the teaching has been omitted: instructions for body work exercises / movements, which are learned from demonstration and experience (see Body Work booklet).

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