

Taking the Leap Meditation Book Group Meeting 2  
Saturday, February 11, 2012

*Welcome to our exploration of movement, meditation & Pema Chodron's Taking the Leap: Freeing Ourselves from Old Habits & Fears. You are welcome to visit my web-site <http://dharmaworks.net/DharmaTouch/> to review a summary of what we cover in each class, find the home work suggestions and other resources you might find helpful. Please try to realize the benefit of mindfulness by practicing some or all of these steps every day.*

1. Homework Suggestions

- a. Meditate for 10 minutes or more in the morning & evening*
- b. Continue to use your form of mindfulness bell or anchor that will remind you to pause and take 3 conscious breaths.*
- c. Reflect & consider journaling on this week's reflection questions & try some or all of the exercises*
- d. Suggested reading: Taking the Leap, Chapter 5, 6 & 7*

2. Reflection Questions & Exercises

a. Chapter 2 Learning to Stay

- i. Pema says that we automatically try to escape the present moment in the face of anything we don't like. She describes 3 styles of seeking relief from even the subtlest unease or discomfort: pleasure seeking, numbing out or using aggression. Identify instances or experiences that discomfort you and consider how you typically respond in these various situations. Another way of considering this is contemplating known habits of pleasure seeking, numbing out or using aggression and then identify the triggering events.*
- ii. These teachings identify the root of our discontent as being self absorption and fear of being present. Pema describes this continual cycle of avoiding being present as our ego. Our fears of feeling and life experience prompt us to find safety zones, which ultimately intensify our fears. Consider the feelings and experiences that are uncomfortable for you. How do you avoid or seek shelter in safety zones?*
- iii. Pema says that we have no tolerance for uncertainty. How would you rate your tolerance for uncertainty, the basic insecurity of life? Recall a time in your life when*

*circumstances were changing. Consider how you responded to the prospect of change. What did uncertainty feel like? Perhaps you can consider your response to the recent snowstorm's impact on your daily activities.*

iv. *Experiment with staying with discomfort or unease this week. Perhaps in the form of dropping an old habit. Watch what happens. Stop. Pause for 1 minute. Listen to the sounds in the room. What was your experience of attending?*

b. Chapter 3 The Habit of Escape

i. *Pema describes our tendency to get "lost" in thought (memory, distraction, planning) gives us a false sense of security. Consider how you typically distract yourself. What form does it take?*

ii. *The fundamental most basic form of shenpa is our ego: our attachment to the Image of who, we think we are. Consider all the ways you construct self-image and what you think, say and do to support it. This can be fun. Create a mandala or constellation of roles you play and how you view yourself, how you wish others to see you. (You might be surprised.)*

iii. *Recall the last time you felt your identity threatened. How did it feel in your body at the moment before your mind contextualized the event and then formulated a response. Then recall how your mind spun thoughts and emotions. Finally, how did you respond?*

iv. *Pema advises that getting in touch with shenpa, the charge behind our emotion, allows us to feel the underlying insecurity inherent in our ever-changing impermanent world. She even goes on to characterize it as a communicable disease. Reflect on when you experience charged emotions, thoughts, words, and what you project out into the world in response.*

v. *Pema writes if we can become familiar with shenpa, when we can fully experience unease we can learn what fans the fire or extinguishes it. Recall a time when you recognized shenpa arising in another and you checked your own response to allow the charge to dissipate. This is the practice of shenluk.*

- vi. *Observe your interactions during the week. Can you refrain and simply observe? Experiment with suspending your immediate response, being present and curious about whether natural intelligence arises.*
- vii. *Look for opportunities to connect with and affirm your basic goodness this week both with regard to your self and others.*
- c. Chapter 4 The Natural Movement of Life
  - i. *Pema encourages us to see our selves and the world as exciting, fresh and new not getting stuck in the rut of clinging to our preferences. Pema describes our universal dilemma as being caught in a fearful narrow holding pattern of avoiding pain and continually seeking comfort. Think of the last few times you faced an unfamiliar situation or an invitation to explore something new and you were able to respond by entering the uncertainty. Consider the outcome. Now recall another situation in which you responded with the predictable ways of holding on to your personal preferences. Consider the outcome.*
  - ii. *Pema offers the radical approach of getting comfortable with what is uncomfortable. Use the next occasion that presents you with the narrow holding pattern of avoiding pain and seeking comfort to pause, look out and breathe.*
  - iii. *She suggests that it is very helpful to recognize shenpa when it is happening in its most subtle and highly charged forms. Recognition is the first step in interrupting a habitual response. Look for as many opportunities as you can to recognize the tug of habit or the heat of an ego threat. Pause long enough to acknowledge it and recognize your choices. Are these choices further empowering old habits or would embracing something new be healthful in other ways?*
  - iv. *Finally Pema invites us to see shenpa as an opportunity for transformation, a doorway to awakening instead of an obstacle. Deepen your self-awareness by considering the choices you habitually make and whether they lead to happiness and freedom or unnecessary suffering, obscuring your intelligence, warmth and capacity to remain open.*