

Taking the Leap Meditation Book Group Meeting 4
Saturday, February 25, 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 and 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. *Incorporate Tonglen practice*
- c. *Continue to use your form of mindfulness bell or anchor that will remind you to pause and take 3 conscious breaths.*
- d. *Reflect & consider journaling on this week's reflection questions & try some or all of the exercises*
- e. *Suggested reading: The Places That Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times by Pema Chodron*

2. Reflection Questions & Exercises

- a. Chapter 8 Uncovering Natural Openness
 - i. *Pema describes us as having a very solid view of our selves and others. We fortify our views with labels. Observe yourself throughout the day and simply notice what, who and how you are labeling. Pause to consider whether your labels are true. How certain are you?*
 - ii. *Each of us has our own capacity for prejudice. Are you fortifying fixed ideas about others in your life? Consider what is motivating this tendency. Penetrate it deeply in your contemplation. If you detect an uncomfortable feeling at work try to acknowledge it and then abide with it as Pema suggests.*
 - iii. *The next time you experience a charge in response to someone you don't agree with challenge yourself to meet the person with an open mind. Can you listen and look deeper than the fixed ideas that you may hold? If circumstances permit, try Pema's suggestion to simply look up at the sky and take 3 conscious breaths. Find out what works for you.*

- iv. *Explore how you can “punctuate your life with moments of pausing” to relax your mind and experience opening. Pema says this is a way to shift global aggression toward peace. Do you agree?*

b. Chapter 9 The Importance of Pain

- i. *Reflect on an experience of loss. Allow tenderness to arise and allow yourself to observe how it manifests and changes as you abide with the feeling.*
- ii. *Consider how much energy you spend acquiring things, according them with value and then safeguarding your attachment to them. Does this use of your energy bring you closer or take you further from experiencing your natural warmth?*
- iii. *Pema said that when her heart broke qualities of natural warmth: kindness, empathy and appreciation spontaneously emerged. Have you had a similar experience? How do these feelings get covered over?*
- iv. *Pema encourages us to train in abiding with uncomfortable feelings. She also cautions against reviving an emotion with a “story line”, feeding it with internal dialog out of habit. Explore abiding with an uncomfortable feeling without magnifying or prolonging beyond its “natural life”. Pema suggests allowing distressing feelings to be a fluid stream of energy we can follow to the experience of empathy.*
- v. *Try out Pema’s practice of bringing the unknown people in our lives into focus by taking an interest in them.*

c. Chapter 10 Unlimited Friendliness

- i. *Reflect on what it means to truly take care of your self, to extend unlimited friendliness to yourself. Do your methods of self-care help you to develop the qualities you will want in facing a life challenge?*
- ii. *Reflect on whether you feel “at home” in your own body/mind. How might this relate to your experience of feeling at home in the world?*
- iii. *Experiment with fasting or giving up a favorite beverage or food. Observe what arises in terms of sensation. Observe what happens in your body when you feel the loss (breath,*

muscle tension, verbal fabrications). Take note of your experience as truthfully as possible. Can your discomfort be a doorway to deeper empathy for others?

- iv. *Pema says that destructive feelings become blessings in disguise when we let their energies arise and pass through us over and over without acting out. Look for disguised blessing this week. Work with them creatively with compassionate abiding:
 - 1. *Contact the experience of being hooked*
 - 2. *Breathing in, relaxing and allowing the feeling*
 - 3. *Breathing out, relaxing and cultivating experience of spaciousness, loosening tensions around the feeling of being hooked (untying the energetic knot)**
- v. *Experiment with the practice of Tonglen. Tonglen is also called the practice of “Sending and Taking”. Consider an unwanted feeling. This could be the tension you felt when giving up your favorite beverage or food. Feel the feeling as you breathe in. Consider the feeling’s antidote. This could be the relaxation and enjoyment you experienced when drinking or eating what you desired. As you breathe out imagine you were sending this enjoyment and relaxation to yourself and others. (We’re supposed to start small.)*
- vi. *Try Tonglen for the first person you meet one day. Pema instructs us to begin by contacting the aversion or attraction they might evoke. Breathing in and contacting the feeling. Aspiring: “May both of us be able to feel feelings like this without shutting down to others.” Breathing out and aspiring: “May we be content and happy.”*