‘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 Triratana Centres. It’s a harder course to teach that ‘Life with Full Attention’ – there’s more intellectual content, more demand on participants to study the book and a much broader range of material.

I’ve tried in the book to give a brief 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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date

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1) 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 well over the 8 weeks, they will learn together (and hopefully become something of a sangha) and *vitally* 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 a copy away (rather than trying to deduct the price of the book from the course). I myself don’t get any royalties from the book, royalties go straight to the LBC.

*The course/ book is designed with comeplete newcomers in mind* (though much of the content of the book, I hope, is suitable for all levels). I want to show people, right from the start, 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 seemed very important to be even more clear about our approach to the Buddha’s teaching.

*Bhante wants us to be teaching the whole of the ‘five stages’ right from the very beginning* and this is really quite a challenge for teachers and many of us are in the early stages of discovering how best to do that. My hope is that the book/course will help Order Members do this. Even the language of ‘stages’ has it’s short comings as we can also approach the ‘stages’ as a mandala of practice, one in which we are trying to work on five aspects at once, and one in which all the five stages can be discovered by going very deeply into any one stage.

*Many of those who come to our Centres (especially young people) will already have looked up Buddhism and meditation on the various online platforms* such as Wikipedia, YouTube, etc. 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 and living presentation of the dharma (that they cannot get online). If we don’t do this people will feel they can learn more watching YouTube clips in the comfort of their bedroom.

*It is all the more important that when we teach that we embody the Three Jewels and our commitment to it* 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 we’ll be recommending others to do.

*The main challenge as a teacher is making the course your own.* I’ve suggested the main dharma points for each week below, but there is too much of them to go into every point I’ve made (even just in this notes). You’ll need to decide what approach to take to each week and find your own way of teaching – finding your own stories and anecdotes for instance (not just repeating stuff in the book all the time). The main thing I think is to be really clear what are is the main point of each evening and make sure that’s got across (I have put the main theme for each week at the top of the presentation).

*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 doinf the home practice yourself as the course goes on.

Structure of the book and suggested structure of the course and class

2) 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 1 *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’ in a different font 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 evocative, suggestive atmosphere and to get anything from it you need to be receptive. I wanted to help people *experience* receptive rather than me merely *write* about it.

*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 kind of resume of what you’ve read and reminder of what you’ve learnt. At the end of the book there is a resume 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 3 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* (the Guide – capital G) and I link the stages of the path to his life story. I don’t necessarily bring this out in the course itself, but I wanted to make the Buddha a very prominent figure in the book. 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.

3) The Structure of the Course

*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 – i.e. leading a group, encouraging participants to talk, not letting any individual dominate, etc. 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 (too much focusing on group discussion tends to weaken the dharma content of the evening).

*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 reduced the amount of no-shows and has given participants the sense that their not coming will 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 (MOB, Metta). 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

*The course mainly takes place outside the course, at home, at work, commuting etc.* I call this ‘home practice’. The usual balance needs to be struck between encouraging them to do the home practice and not making them feel bad about it if they don’t. 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. The three things I’d recommend as the fundamentals for the course is:

1. Setting up a regular daily mediation and using the course to set that up – what supports do they need, etc
2. Going on a retreat (it’s on retreat that we get a real taste of the dharma and a sense of what meditation can do).
3. Attending the Centre regularly – we need the Sangha in order to grow

*Reading the book*. I emphasize that this course includes *a home study aspect*, it’s about views and attitudes and deepening ones understanding of the dharma, so I ask them to make sure they put time aside each week to read [It’s worth noting that with the internet etc, many people are hardly reading at all, so they need some encouraging to read and reflect about the dharma].

There is quite to 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).

4) Suggested structure for the class

6.45pm. *I suggest participants come early to have a rest*. I suggest people go and 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.

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

Week 1: Introduction

*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 mis).* 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 1: Integration and the ‘fit mind’

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| The main point this week is to get 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. |

*Cultivating a ‘fit mind’ –* The journey begins with cultivatinga 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, what we could call ‘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 thatthey are thoughts not facts.

*Practice Week One*

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: finshinig task, 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.’