

Curriculum | Two Year Professional Training in Contemplative Psychology

Each module consists of theory and an experiential part, so that the presented topics can be processed on a personal level. Participants are introduced to the skillful means of contemplative psychology, and guided along the way. Ongoing meditation practice is part of each training week(end). Between the modules, participants meet in regional groups for exchange, intervision, and practice.

“At the core of contemplative psychology lies the conviction that every human being is inherently equipped with indestructible and life-affirmative strength. This strength, which transcends health and illness, is called brilliant inherent sanity.”

Module 1: Trust in Inherent Sanity (4 days)

Our approach is to create an environment in which this basic energetic force can be experienced. In order to be truly helpful to others, it is necessary for us to be able to recognize and invite our basic sanity. A prerequisite for this is to first learn to notice our own inherent sanity and to develop trust in its healing power. Through this process, we also become aware of our habitual patterns, which cause us to lose access to inherent sanity again and again.

This is described in the *Three Marks of Existence* - suffering, impermanence, and egolessness. Our inner resistance against these three facts of life often causes confused emotional and mental patterns and, as a result, habitual patterns driven by impulse. If we recognize these impulses, we have a chance to meet them with mindfulness and friendliness. In this way, they provide us with a wide range of possibilities for the exploration of our confusion.

In the Two Year Professional Training, three methods of mindfulness are being introduced and put into practice:

- Mindfulness meditation
- *Body-Speech-Mind-Supervision Practice*
- *Speaking from the Heart Groups* (a group practice of telling the microscopic truth of one's present experience)

Module 2: The Development of Ego in the View of Contemplative Psychology (Weekend)

- Theory, contemplation, and exercises around “Ego and Egolessness” (according to the model of the *Five Skandhas*)
- Deepening the methods of mindfulness

The conviction/sense that there is an “I” arises from a process of identification. Once the sense of this “I” is established, it determines what I think about myself and the world and how I feel, behave, and get in contact with others. As long as these images and concepts about myself and others stay unconscious, they potentially keep me imprisoned in a conceptual space of ideas, demands, hopes, and fears.

In this module, we will explore the model of the Five Skandhas, which in Buddhist psychology describes the development of ego, and relate it to our personal experience. By raising awareness in this way, we invite alertness in dealing with these ego structures.

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Module 3: Working with Emotions (Weekend)

- Theory and exercises around emotions as important building blocks of ego - *The Six Realms of Existence*
- Wholesome feelings versus emotions that “create suffering” as objects of mindfulness practice
- Introduction to the method *Four Step Practice*
- Deepening meditation technique *Touch and Go*

The basic nature of emotions is pure energy. When we are in touch with this pure energy, it can give us precious hints about emotions and the potential of the present moment. In this way, emotions can become expressions of inherent wisdom - without conflict.

When we work with others, we focus our attention on recognizing emotions, our own as well as those of our clients. What are emotions from the viewpoint of Buddhist psychology? Dealing with them directly - learning to let them be instead of suppressing them or acting them out - is the key to the inherent wisdom within the emotion.

Module 4: Trusting the Flow of our Inherent Aliveness (Weekend)

Meditation can easily be used to bypass our feelings, emotions, and thoughts. If our physical, emotional or mental aliveness seem too intense and therefore unpleasant, we try to suppress what we feel in order to return to the “still waters of mindfulness”. When we use meditation in this way, it becomes a manipulation that in the end leads to us distancing or alienating ourselves from our own experience, and we “miss out on our lives”, as Chögyam Trungpa aptly put it.

In order to train ourselves in recognizing this “trap” in meditation, *Shambhala Meditation* by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche will be introduced at this weekend. We scrutinize on a personal level what impact meditation has on the way we are with ourselves, and by sensing deeply into our inner world we learn to trust the wisdom of all that is alive inside us. Also, we will deepen the mindfulness meditation we have practiced so far, and particularly explore its impact on and relevance for our daily life.

Module 5: Patterns of Energy from the Viewpoint of Contemplative Psychology (Deepening Week)

- Introduction to the Mandala of the *Five Buddha Families*
- Introduction to the *Mandala of the Elements*
- Introduction to *Maitri Space Awareness Practice* (focusing on the elements)
- Introduction to the method *Process Group* (cross talk)
- Deepening in Body-Speech-Mind-Supervision Groups

Maitri Space Awareness Practice is based on the knowledge Buddhist Psychology has about five patterns of energy that interweave us and our world. It consists of several experiential practices (including body postures, the use of colors, creative expression, and more).

These five archetypal patterns and the elements associated with them completely permeate our lives. Our health and sanity (both mental and emotional) is dependent on how we deal with these energies. Maitri practice awakens these different emotional patterns of energy, and by dealing with them mindfully, it enables us to make friends with them.

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Module 6: Developing Compassionate Presence (Weekend)

- Working with others: distinguishing empathy from compassion, setting clear boundaries
- Developing compassion as active care for others
- Deepening the understanding of inherent sanity (Relative and absolute *bodhichitta*)
- Introduction to the methods *Compassionate Exchange* and secularized *Tonglen*
- Exercises around methods of mutual feedback

Compassionate Exchange, the core of the Two Year Professional Training, is introduced at this weekend as the basis for working with others.

We explore the individual mechanisms that block or prevent our compassion from arising, and practice using our insights in a way that helps communication with others.

At this module the transition from personal process to actual work with others is taking place – within the safe container of the group.

Module 7: Patterns of Energy in the Communication Process (Deepening week)

- Transforming emotions
- Deepening of Maitri Space Awareness practice (with the focus on communication)
- Deepening of Process Groups

We can recognize and transform unwholesome aspects of our personality and whatever is in the way for our natural temperament, our personal energy structure, to reveal itself in a wholesome way. The approach “Our greatest weakness can become our greatest strength” comes alive and can be experienced.

Module 8: Four Bones in Space - Stepping Stones in the Therapeutic Process (Weekend)

- Deepening of Compassionate Exchange (with the four “bones”)
- Deepening of Tonglen
- Introduction of the “Karuna Project”

This module focuses once more on Compassionate Exchange. It is enriched by the “four bones”. Based on the wisdom aspects of the Five Buddha Families we learn to structure Compassionate Exchange in a conducive way.

Our trust in our ability to open up and make ourselves available to others in Compassionate Exchange is increasing.

The “Karuna Project” – the final project of the Two Year Professional Training – is introduced. It consists of five hours work with others outside the group.

Module 9: Supervision weekend (Weekend)

- Start of and supervision for the Karuna Project

Together we prepare, practice, and supervise each other for the project.

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Module 10: Patterns of Energy in Working with Others (Deepening week)

- Deepening of Maitri Space Awareness practice (focus on compassion)
- Deepening of Compassionate Exchange

This module joins the work with Compassionate Exchange with the Maitri Space Awareness practice of the Five Buddha Families. Step by step, the participants integrate their understanding of the transformation of energies and emotions into the practice of Compassionate Exchange. They learn that whatever might come up, they can meet their personal styles and experiences with true friendliness. In this way, they can explore and develop their personal relationship to emotions and their individual ways of communicating. Furthermore, they practice intensively giving and receiving feedback and supporting each other in that way.

Module 11: Graduation (5 days)

Our work together culminates in a last deepening week. Every participant presents their personal journey through the training, and their project. The training culminates in a graduation ceremony and the handing out of completion certificates. A festive banquet concludes the week. The Two Year Professional Training cohort completes their shared journey through the training with a mutual commitment to be available to the world as a beacon of inherent sanity. Graduates of the Two Year Professional Training are encouraged to take part in the Advanced Training and Postgraduate Programmes when available.