



Mitsu Ishii: So, shall we begin? The topic this week was "preliminary practice" as mentioned in the first line of the Lojong.

Mitsu Ishii: Would anyone like to share thoughts about this?

Eliza Madrigal: Dao, you have a report...

Dao Yheng: so do you eliza :P

Gaya Ethaniel: :)

Mitsu Ishii: Also, those of you who would like to do a report, please contact Dao or Gaya who will be able to add you to the wiki.

Eliza Madrigal: :) hehe

pablito Steampunk is Offline

Dao Yheng: I was going to ask if Cal about his thoughts since he suggested the topic

Zen Arado: I wrote a little note

Mitsu Ishii: <http://ways-of-knowing.wik.is/>

Eliza Madrigal: We both mentioned the 'four reflections'

Calvino Rabeni: I have a writeup, not yet posted

Calvino Rabeni: I read the proverb broadly, as - "what do you need to know about practice and reality, in order to succeed at this endeavor"

Calvino Rabeni: Lojong seems to assume a maturity

Mitsu Ishii: please go on Calvino

Calvino Rabeni: or at least a base in practices, e.g. that one knows how to "stay in primordial awareness"

Dao Yheng: right -- the third step is "Find the consciousness you had before you were born."

Calvino Rabeni: But on the other hand, it is a "big framework" for practice

Calvino Rabeni: and needs to accommodate people at different levels of experiences

Dao Yheng: yes, you and Eliza both mentioned ways that the "dream" instruction cuts both ways

Eliza Madrigal: someone used the phrase 'trap door' this morning in another context, and I think it can be like that.... seems simple when you walk into it, but demands 'expansion' to apply?

Calvino Rabeni: I would say, "preliminaries" are whatever you need depending on where you are with it

Dao Yheng: what preliminaries have you found useful, Cal?

Calvino Rabeni: Meditation and contemplation

Calvino Rabeni: as practices.

Calvino Rabeni: I'm aware some people would like a kind of doctrinal understanding also

Dao Yheng: Hmm, that relates to some of the issues I've been turning over too

Calvino Rabeni: as in , understanding principles

Calvino Rabeni: but I personally focus on practice

Mitsu Ishii: (Katharine is stuck in some subway nightmare apparently)

Eliza Madrigal: Oh :(

Gaya Ethaniel: I prefer reading about 'principles' well after substantial practices.

Eliza Madrigal: :)

Calvino Rabeni: Yes, and the lojong states to that idea

Gaya Ethaniel gets conditioned easily ... ^^;;

Calvino Rabeni: Liberate yourself by observing first, then analyzing

Calvino Rabeni: encouraging the grounding as a preliminary

Zen Arado: isn't this slogan more about getting ourselves into the right frame of mind before we approach any practice?

Eliza Madrigal: Maybe when you set out to practice something you run into the groundwork needed....

Eliza Madrigal: Well, that surely seems one angle, Zen

Eliza Madrigal: an important one

Dao Yheng: there's a bit of chicken and egg problem with "getting ourselves into the right frame of mind" though

Calvino Rabeni: One way is to "drop" ideas about the meaning, instead of building them up

Dao Yheng: how do you know what you're thinking is the right frame is actually going to be helpful?

Calvino Rabeni: Through experience Dao

Zen Arado: Tibetan teachings emphasize Guru visualization

Gaya Ethaniel: Well ... there always is a possibility that one would never stop the groundworks ... I don't necessarily think one needs to see the list as a 'step-by-step' guide.

Calvino Rabeni: I don't think it can be reasoned in advance

Mitsu Ishii: Traditionally, the notion of preliminary practice was the idea that it is difficult to practice contemplation until we have settled down a bit (they phrase this in terms of "purifying karma" but essentially it is settling down, getting into a receptive frame so to speak)

Calvino Rabeni: Yes Gaya, that is true / important

Zen Arado: yes

Calvino Rabeni: a preliminary is maybe different than a Base

Mitsu Ishii: This is related especially to the Lamrim approach

Zen Arado: not just rushing into it carelessly

Calvino Rabeni: Basics are always there

Gaya Ethaniel: Probably Mitsu, 'cleaning up' one's life has to come in at some point.

Eliza Madrigal: Also, the preliminaries become more 'attractive' when one dives into practice....

Zen Arado: perhaps I am thinking of meditation practice here

Dao Yheng: I have this sense too, Eliza

Zen Arado: how you settle yourself for that

Calvino Rabeni: Preliminaries suggest a step one could leave behind, but Basics are important at any time in a practice

Calvino Rabeni: Gaya yes - tha is important

Eliza Madrigal: their usefulness and value becomes apparant and enjoyable as one goes... like a continual process rather than a sense of graduading from one thing to the next

Gaya Ethaniel: I think so too Eliza, preliminaries actually involve doing some serious practice.

Mitsu Ishii: Well, for example, one preliminary practice could be, doing 100,000 prostrations

Calvino Rabeni: If your life is dominated by other concerns - survival or psychology or some such - it would be harder to have attention for a lojong practice

Dao Yheng: There's a sense in which cleaning up one's life is the "end" accomplishment rather than the "beginning" preliminary

Eliza Madrigal: like 'beginners mind' I guess? You don't 'move on' from it really....

Eliza Madrigal nods to Dao

Calvino Rabeni: Clearing and purifying is an ongoing task

Mitsu Ishii: One tricky thing about the notion of preliminary practice is that it can set up the idea of a progression, which is something that in some schools/teachings is emphasized as a problematic view  
Gaya Ethaniel nods.

Eliza Madrigal can't imagine that anyone would want to do 10,000 prostrations unless they'd tasted the value of deep practice

Mitsu Ishii: Well, it's a traditional approach, do 100,000 prostrations (and a bunch of other things too)

Gaya Ethaniel: Some clearing for me just happens along the way too. I think 'ongoing' is more apt in my experiences.

Eliza Madrigal: yes I know.... just thinking for myself, that I never imagined I would happily engage in so many rituals and such

Mitsu Ishii: In our sangha, however, we don't do formal preliminary practice, but just apply the idea of settling down, clearing things a bit, etc.

Calvino Rabeni: For instance, though, someone who is an alcoholic might do better in a treatment program instead of taking lojong as a path -

Calvino Rabeni: Or whose consciousness is dominated by problems

Calvino Rabeni: So in a sense, one needs to be in pretty good shape already to have a contemplative practice be a good life practice

Gaya Ethaniel: Just try out 108 prostrations Eliza ... :) The smallest amount one can do.

Eliza Madrigal: :))

Mitsu Ishii: Well, to me, the interesting thing about Lojong isn't so much to see it as a set of principles but the fact that it is a set of "rules of thumb" which are a handy guide when you get into trouble.

Mitsu Ishii: also I like the fact that it seems to have a sense of humor

Calvino Rabeni: In my opinion, all the numerology and specific ritual forms are extra baggage

Zen Arado: Pema Chodron's Lojong teaching can be of benefit without serious commitment wouldn't you say though?

Calvino Rabeni: And the lojong ideas are high level guidelines

Mitsu Ishii: or "humour" as those of you in some odd countries spell it

Calvino Rabeni: that can't be proceduralized

Gaya Ethaniel: Yes, everyone develops differently so better use it as a guide rather than rules.

Eliza Madrigal: yes, I think there is a lot to hear in the slogans at any level, Zen, agree

Mitsu Ishii: for example "don't feel sorry for yourself" or "don't expect any applause" are pretty funny

Eliza Madrigal nods

Dao Yheng: hi kat!

Eliza Madrigal: Hi Katharine, glad you made it

Gaya Ethaniel: Hello Katherine :)

Katharine Kozlowski: sorry I'm so late!!

Zen Arado: Hi Katherine

Mitsu Ishii: When Dao and Katharine and I first stumbled upon the Lojong we were really amused by it. I found it quite refreshing to just read them as a sort of group.

Calvino Rabeni: Maybe funny? If they violate a cultural expectation

Gaya Ethaniel: Click one of the yellow ball itself not the chair Katherine.

Calvino Rabeni: But there are traditions of "good done in secret"

Mitsu Ishii: that should be one of the new Lojong aphorisms for the 21st century

Mitsu Ishii: "Click one of the yellow ball itself not the chair"

Gaya Ethaniel: I heard somewhere that if one expects 'applauds' one negates any good done through a virtuous action.

Dao Yheng: :)

Katharine Kozlowski: i thought the ball would be upset

Katharine Kozlowski: if i sat on it

Gaya Ethaniel: heh :)

Dao Yheng: the preliminaries really are that way to me (yellow ball, not chair!)

Katharine Kozlowski: i wonder if jenny holzer read the lojong

Eliza Madrigal: :)))

Gaya Ethaniel: lol

Mitsu Ishii: yes, very jenny holzer

Calvino Rabeni: I'm not much of a "sutra" reader, but I am impressed with the lojong

Mitsu Ishii: To me there's a very interesting question at the heart of this "preliminary practice" one

Dao Yheng: I think encoded in the weird rituals and practices are a way of seeing the world

Katharine Kozlowski: so what are the preliminaries, anyway

Dao Yheng: it seems odd or non-sensical at first

Gaya Ethaniel: "Groundwork is the development of the abilities and motivations needed to practice mind training: stable attention, mindfulness in daily behavior, appreciation that your life is yours and yours alone, determination to step out of pattern-based experience, and a genuine desire to help others do so, too."

Eliza Madrigal: Gaya... thinking...yes the idea being what is done 'in secret' has more merit... which I think means that 'we' ascribe more value really ... we 'feel' generous and therefore are able to be generous

Mitsu Ishii: which gets back to this fundamental tension between practice as a process and practice as a gesture towards the always already present.

Calvino Rabeni: I'm not sure that some big theory or principle can be read into them though - they seem like a miscellaneous set of pragmatic tips

Mitsu Ishii: Yes, I agree, Calvino.

Calvino Rabeni: Gaya's statement is a good one about practice

Gaya Ethaniel: <http://www.unfetteredmind.org/mindtraining/1.php>

Dao Yheng: That too calvino

Katharine Kozlowski: i used to be very taken with the idea of making art in secret and then throwing it away

Mitsu Ishii: For example, Suzuki roshi (Shunryu Suzuki) always used to like to say, do not practice with a "gaining idea"

Eliza Madrigal: :) yes... or sand art... putting all the work into something just for the sake of that moment

Gaya Ethaniel: More I think in terms of "we are all in a same boat." I don't see the need for applause ... one would do what's good. It will be good for all those in the boat.

Mitsu Ishii: which is actually one of the Lojong phrases "Abandon all hope of results"

Katharine Kozlowski: also don't expect applause

Mitsu Ishii: which sounds sort of bleak but is actually really hilarious while also totally useful.

Mitsu Ishii: the notion of "results" and doing things to achieve a result presupposes an idea of time, of doing X to get Y

Eliza Madrigal: yes and there is nothing real about your confusion... it is a 'nice' way of knocking one off their own horse....

Mitsu Ishii: yet at the same time, it is actually helpful to settle down a bit as a basis for practice. So we all have to practice with this fundamental tension, try to resolve that koan

Calvino Rabeni: Lojong emphasizes the integration of various opposites - naturally

Calvino Rabeni: like surrender and responsibility

Eliza Madrigal: hm, nods

Mitsu Ishii: eventually, these seeming opposites come together and can be seen as the same

Calvino Rabeni: but it seems to emphasize - don't depend on others, on the world, be responsible for your own practice

Gaya Ethaniel: They only look like opposite if one takes a position, me & you ...

Calvino Rabeni: Yes, they come together

Calvino Rabeni: lojong speaks both sides

Zen Arado: some of the slogans are very 'unworldly'

Mitsu Ishii: My feeling is those aphorisms are more about not worrying about trying to change other people, i.e., complaining about others, etc.

Gaya Ethaniel: Unworldly Zen?

Mitsu Ishii: (the ones about not worrying about other people, etc.)

Mitsu Ishii: please go on Zen

Zen Arado: yes the opposite action to what most expect you to do

Zen Arado: one about taking blame yourself I dimly remember

Mitsu Ishii: yes, I think it can be quite liberating

Zen Arado: I read these quite a while ago

Mitsu Ishii: so instead of always worrying about winning, succeeding, the aphorism just says, go ahead and lose

Zen Arado: yes

Mitsu Ishii: which can really be quite a relief

Katharine Kozlowski: When everything goes wrong, treat disaster as a way to wake up.

Zen Arado: so counterintuitive in a way

Eliza Madrigal: yes that's the feeling... relief

Zen Arado: to normal ways of thinking

Calvino Rabeni: The theme "invest in loss" runs throughout lojong

Eliza Madrigal: give up hope of results

Zen Arado: yes

Calvino Rabeni: As does "intentional suffering"

Calvino Rabeni: Or "conscious suffering"

Dao Yheng: Yes, a way to value suffering, rather than turn away from it

Calvino Rabeni: It is not a moral issue, it is an issue of seeing reality

Zen Arado: absorbing rather than avoiding suffering

Mitsu Ishii: "Solve all problems by accepting the bad energy and sending out the good."

Calvino Rabeni: Lojong supports a moral perspective, but goes deeper than that

Gaya Ethaniel: I think it helps with stopping reactive emotions, ie blaming others would certainly disconnect ... and involves anger.

Zen Arado: making a space for it

Katharine Kozlowski: but it's not saying we ought to suffer as much as possible, right? i feel like i tend to go off the deepend with this

Zen Arado: no but we have more capacity to absorb it than we think ?

Dao Yheng: Yeah, I think that is one of tricky points with lojong

Calvino Rabeni: "bring your emotions to yourr practice" but don't let them distract

Mitsu Ishii: Well, it's not really saying we should suffer, exactly. It is more referring to acceptance

Zen Arado: the space enlarges

Calvino Rabeni: No worries Katharine

Eliza Madrigal: accept all your aversions, etc... nothing left out

Eliza Madrigal: everything as the material for 'awakening'

Katharine Kozlowski: but once there is acceptance suffering is already something else

Calvino Rabeni: suffering is inevitable, no need to work to get more

Zen Arado: I found this odea startling at first

Calvino Rabeni: Although it might sometimes be useful to do so :)

Mitsu Ishii: I'm sure Chekawa didn't have in mind people going around intentionally trying to make themselves suffer

Zen Arado: so used to avoidance strategy

Gaya Ethaniel: To accept, one needs to be present ... to be present, one cannot start constructing the world view of duality.

Mitsu Ishii: but if you encounter a situation where you can take in some bad energy and give out good energy, then he'd say: go for it

Calvino Rabeni: No it is not an avoidance strategy, or necessarily, a way to "escape" suffering

Gaya Ethaniel: I think that's why there are a lot of aphorisms on us and other people, what to do.

Zen Arado: I have heard of practitioners who actually seek suffering to enrich their practice

Eliza Madrigal: it really seems to break down preferences... it isn't only the 'bad' things we accept, but accepting 'good' things in the same way, reduces the romanticism/duality of those too

Calvino Rabeni: the tonglen is a basic transformation of awareness, not a moral gesture

Zen Arado: nods

Eliza Madrigal nods

Gaya Ethaniel: I think such a method has its limit/downside Zen ...

Mitsu Ishii: Yes, I mean the Lojong aren't really a complete system, I don't think they were meant as a system per se. They're just a handy set of rules of thumb so to speak.

Zen Arado: yes perhaps we need to grow towards that....

Gaya Ethaniel: It's very good in terms of increasing sensitivity, I grant but ... not sustainable in long term.

Zen Arado: too much too soon could be bad....

Mitsu Ishii: like a cheat sheet for contemplation

Calvino Rabeni: Agree, Mitsu

Eliza Madrigal: :) Like that!

Dao Yheng: I have some similar concerns as Katherine though -- which is why it seems important to me that preliminaries and some establishment of the first three seems essential to me

Dao Yheng: # First, train in the preliminaries.

# Treat everything you perceive as a dream.

# Find the consciousness you had before you were born.

Mitsu Ishii: right the second and third ones are really advanced!

Katharine Kozlowski: most of my experiences of waking up have seemed to be to some extent triggered by intense suffering

Mitsu Ishii: and even the first in a way

Calvino Rabeni: they are very advanced

Mitsu Ishii: the funny thing is he put those at the front, and the most funny/pragmatic ones towards the end

Zen Arado: suffering can be a shortcut to awakening?

Calvino Rabeni: Yes

Gaya Ethaniel: I'd say depends on an individual.

Calvino Rabeni: only if aware

Zen Arado: maybe in the context that we cause so much of our own suffering

Eliza Madrigal: and if aware then its all 'unsatisfactory' in a sense... at least as something to stick with

Gaya Ethaniel: Some people wake up from a profound sense of isolation.

Calvino Rabeni: Right , the foundational stuff is at the beginning

Mitsu Ishii: Yes I agree Gaya, it is very individual

Gaya Ethaniel: It is all individual ...

Calvino Rabeni: # Stay in the primeval consciousness, the basis of everything.

# Between meditations, treat everything as an illusion.

Calvino Rabeni: not a step by step thing

Mitsu Ishii: But there is a general principle there

Calvino Rabeni: many general principles, if you read between the lines

Mitsu Ishii: There's a Zen koan which is something like "Imagine you have a hot iron ball in your throat and you can't spit it out and you can't swallow it down"

Zen Arado: are we going to study one teaching per session?

Zen Arado: yes 'MU'

Zen Arado: perhaps we need to have that dedication

Eliza Madrigal: Ah, Zen... I think the plan is to become familiar with lojong for a few sessions and then move on...

Zen Arado: ok

Mitsu Ishii: Or a similar one about being trapped on a cliff, running from a tiger, with tigers below waiting to eat him, and he sees a strawberry growing out of the cliff: "How sweet it tastes!"

Dao Yheng: Zen, do you have in mind a slogan for next week?

Zen Arado: ha no I thought you were doing one at a time

Mitsu Ishii: When you're "stuck" in a situation that apparently has no escape, that's a moment when you might be able to see a radical alternative.

Mitsu Ishii: so in that sense intense suffering could be a helpful situation, if it seems hopeless enough :)

Katharine Kozlowski: there is this poem by rumi i really love, he says "there is a secret medicine given only to those who hurt so hard they can't hope" ... it's the not hoping that's really important, but the hurting can get you there

Eliza Madrigal: hmmm :))

Mitsu Ishii: it's the giving up of the ordinary notion that we need to find a way "out" with our ordinary thinking

Calvino Rabeni: Lojong recommends focus and intention in practice - in some way that quality might find its way into this seminar

Mitsu Ishii: it's like being trapped in a box in Flatland, and realizing that we have other dimensions to our being

Eliza Madrigal: and we wouldn't have even considered that if not for necessity

Mitsu Ishii: Yes, our idea was to talk about Lojong for several sessions (this is already our third? or fourth? on Lojong) and then move on to a different subject area.

Mitsu Ishii: right Eliza

Gaya Ethaniel: I did read the reports ... sorry we didn't get to discuss them much Dao and Eliza. Thanks again.

Zen Arado: I liked 11,12 13

Gaya Ethaniel: I will hopefully find time to do a report for next week :)

Mitsu Ishii: which ones are those Zen?

Mitsu Ishii: we are all looking at different lists

Zen Arado: on transforming mishaps into the path

Zen Arado: drivew all blames into one

Gaya Ethaniel: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lojong>

Gaya Ethaniel: We are looking at this list Zen.

Calvino Rabeni: yes, it is on the "conscious suffering" theme

Zen Arado: begrateful to everyone

Mitsu Ishii: Okay, so shall we spend one more session on Lojong, and this time focused on the aphorisms

Zen just mentioned?

Zen Arado: or just point three

Calvino Rabeni: Accepting blame is = accepting responsibility

Dao Yheng: # When practicing unconditional acceptance, start with yourself.

# When everything goes wrong, treat disaster as a way to wake up.

# Take all the blame yourself.

Dao Yheng: are those the ones?

Katharine Kozlowski: i like those

Zen Arado: they are revolutionary I think

Mitsu Ishii: yes indeed

Zen Arado: yes

Dao Yheng: k, sounds good

Eliza Madrigal: Dao, btw I relate to and love the word 'flip' to describe... really feel that's what practice does to us... flips everything upside down/inside out until we can't see distinctions....

Dao Yheng: :) I used to like the pancake metaphor -- at first you pour on the batter and it looks like nothing's happening

Dao Yheng: then you flip it over and it really looks like a pancake!

Mitsu Ishii: Yes, I like the way you said that Eliza

Calvino Rabeni: Another name for it is "reversal"

Eliza Madrigal: :)

Eliza Madrigal: leaves us in an excruciatingly open place, in a sense.

Zen Arado: :)

Zen Arado: groundlessness

Eliza Madrigal: :)

Gaya Ethaniel: :)

Katharine Kozlowski: but also nothing has changed

Dao Yheng: very true!

Eliza Madrigal: hmmm, nods

Zen Arado: yes there never was any ground

Mitsu Ishii: yes that's another aspect of it: it was always like that

Gaya Ethaniel: One sees better perhaps.

Zen Arado: in the first place :)

Eliza Madrigal: the consciousness before you were born

Mitsu Ishii: but we thought it wasn't

Gaya Ethaniel: I have to run to another meeting. Thanks everyone!

Eliza Madrigal: Bye Gaya!

Mitsu Ishii: goodbye everyone and thanks for coming

Mitsu Ishii: bye Gaya

Calvino Rabeni: Paradoxically, groundlessness is dependent on what consciousness can sustain in practice



Dao Yheng: bye gaya!

Zen Arado: thanks Gaya and everyone

Mitsu Ishii: sorry for spacing on the announcement.

Calvino Rabeni: Bye:

Katharine Kozlowski: bye

Eliza Madrigal: Thanks so much Everyone! Bye for now

Dao Yheng: Zen and Calvino, I'm not sure how to add you to the wiki yet

Zen Arado: bye Eliza

Zen Arado: must run too

Zen Arado: bye

Eliza Madrigal waves warmly